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THE UNHAPPY WOMAN STARED AT RALPH FOR A MOMENT, AND THEN FELL DOWN IN A SWOON.

A LOYAL LOVE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

THREE o'clock on a bleak November day in London.

Outside, the streets were shrouded in gloom; the flare of the gas-lights could scarcely be distinguished in the midst of the thick low fog which hung over the city, making the passage of pedestrians a very difficult matter, and reducing the pace of the sprightly hansom, and the more unwieldy growler, alike, to a funeral march.

The shopkeepers struggled gallantly to display their wares in the most attractive manner, but for the most part, it was a melancholy failure.

The few foot-passengers whom business compelled to be abroad stumbled along in the ever-increasing darkness, intent only on reaching their

destination in safety, pausing occasionally to make sure they were progressing in the right direction.

In striking contrast to the dreary aspect outside, was the drawing-room of 35 Gloucester Terrace.

Thick curtains of a warm red colour had been drawn across the window; the shaded light from the handsome chandeliers filled the room with a soft mellow radiance, and a bright fire glowed ruddily in the grate.

The first glance into this cosy apartment suggested emphatically that it was a woman's room.

Every article of furniture, from the exquisitely patterned carpet, to the dainty etchings on the walls, bore the stamp of refinement and good taste, and though unmistakably costly, one lost the sense of their intrinsic value in admiration of their artistic effect.

On this particular afternoon the room was tenanted by two ladies, the younger of whom reclined with an easy grace on a handsome couch.

In popular estimation, Adelaide Travers was a fortunate woman.

She was young and beautiful, rich and talented.

For the last twelve months she had been the idol of the theatre-going public. Enthusiastic audiences had hung, as it were, upon her words, and rapturously applauded her superb acting.

Men of every age and rank united to do her homage; merchant prince and haughty peer had alike sought her hand in marriage; the one lav- ing at her feet his vast wealth, the other his illustrious name.

Society had received her with open arms; the most exclusive houses had thrown wide their portals, and no breath of scandal had ever touched her name.

She had risen to a dizzy eminence, but success had not intoxicated her, and herein perhaps lay the secret of her strength.

Some of her acquaintances called her proud, and to a certain extent they were right.

She was proud, but in her pride there lurked no element of scorn.

She knew her beauty was far above the ordinary standard, but the knowledge did not spoil her, and when her friends spoke of her



heaven-sent talents, she smiled to herself at the remembrance of years of solitary study, when with aching head and tired brain, she sat, night after night in her little room, striving to fit herself for the great battle of life.

She had few real friends or relatives, indeed it might be said she was practically alone in the world.

She called Mrs. Porter—the lady who lived with her—aunt, but that was simply a matter of policy, there being really no relationship between them.

Mrs. Porter sat by the fire, a novel in her hands, though apparently its pages did not engage her attention.

Her face wore an air of surprise, not unminged with dismay, and she said rather irritably,—

"Who is this Mr. Gardiner, Adelaide? I do not remember the name."

The girl raised her head languidly.

"He is a young author who has written a new play and wishes me to hear him read it. He is really a nice lad, who has done me several good services, and I could not refuse his request, though I fear I can be of little use. It is almost time for him to be here," she concluded, looking at the clock.

Whatever reply Mrs. Porter might have been contemplating was prevented by a sharp ring at the bell, and presently a servant appeared, bearing a card on which was neatly inscribed the name, "Frank Gardiner."

Adelaide received him with a kindly smile of welcome, and laughingly complimented him upon his bravery in facing such dreadful weather.

"The elements must indeed have been bad," he replied, gallantly, "to have prevented me from keeping an appointment with Miss Travers."

Mrs. Porter glanced furtively at the speaker.

He was certainly young, as Adelaide had said, not more than twenty three or twenty four, with a frank open face, wreathed just now in a winning smile.

His hair was of a light auburn colour, which harmonised well with his fair complexion and blue eyes, while his features were delicate and refined to a degree almost womanly.

"I must not allow you to commence making pretty speeches," Adelaide observed, with a charming smile, "I fear the flattery may bias my judicial impartiality, and our time moreover, is precious. You have brought the play?"

"Yes, it is here," and he produced a roll of manuscript from his pocket.

Adelaide reassured herself; Mrs. Porter, to whom all plays, from Macbeth to the latest sensational melodrama were alike indifferent, plunged once more into the pages of her novel, and the young man commenced to read in a low musical voice, which was very pleasant to hear.

Adelaide did not interrupt, but when he had finished she said thoughtfully,—

"It is very beautiful, Mr. Gardiner, and there are many striking and effective passages, but the matter is too serious to be decided immediately. If you will leave the manuscript with me for a few days I shall be better able to pronounce judgement."

"You are really very kind," he murmured, "how adequately to express my gratitude I cannot tell, but you will not think me unthankful, even if I do not put my thoughts into words."

"Let us not discuss that," she answered, "I fear my assistance is of little practical value; but in any case there should be no question of gratitude between friends."

Her little speech was perfectly sincere, and she did not notice the light which kindled in the young man's eyes, as he listened to her words.

"You will take a cup of tea before you go," she said presently, and he eagerly acquiesced in the proposal, since it kept him a little longer in her society.

"The young man seems to attach great importance to your opinion," said Mrs. Porter, when he had finally taken his departure.

"Yes, it should add something to one's vanity, should it not?"

Mrs. Porter coughed significantly, but being a wise woman, forebore prolonging the discussion,

though she had a fairly definite notion of the usual outcome of friendship between a young man and a beautiful woman.

Meanwhile, Frank Gardiner, his mind full of the lovely girl he had just left, was hurrying home as quickly as he could through the darkened streets. Love thrives on very unsubstantial fare, and Adelaide's gracious manner and kindly words had lifted the youth into the seventh heaven.

He was suddenly recalled to a sense of mundane matters by running against a gentleman, who had just turned the corner from a neighbouring street.

"I beg your pardon," stammered Frank apologetically, "I must plead this horrible fog as my excuse."

The stranger broke into a genial, hearty laugh.

"All right, Frank my boy," he cried, in a clear tone, the purity of which even the fog could not spoil; "no harm done, rather the reverse, since, without this accident, I should have missed you in the dark. Will you come and dine with me—that is, if you have no previous engagement?"

Frank's eyes glistened, as he grasped the other's extended hand,—

"Somerset," he said, in astonishment, "you in London! This is a pleasant surprise; I had no idea you were within a thousand miles of town. I accept your invitation with pleasure. Are you staying at your club?"

"No! I have but just arrived, and am quartered at the Langham for the present; shall we say seven o'clock?"

"Yes, that will suit me admirably."

"Very good; then I will wish you adieu until seven," and with another shake of the hand, the two men separated.

Frank was honestly pleased at this meeting; he looked up to and respected Somerset as an elder brother, and though they rarely met, absence never impaired the bond of friendship which existed between them.

The dinner was a great success, and as they drew their chairs to the fire and proceeded to light their cigars, Somerset said with a friendly smile, "Now, Frank, tell me about yourself, have you got your foot planted upon the ladder of fame yet?"

The younger man had not lost the art of blushing, and his face flushed at his friend's suggestion.

"I do not know about fame," he replied, "but I believe I am succeeding fairly well. Two or three of my light pieces have taken the public fancy, and are putting money into my pocket."

"Yes! I learned so much from Graystone, who does the reviews for half a dozen papers, and I congratulate you. But—excuse my interference, dear boy, I speak only as a friend—I trust you are not going to remain satisfied with this measure of success. What of the masterpiece we were discussing at our last meeting? You have not abandoned that, I hope."

Frank's colour returned, as he thought of his afternoon in Gloucester Terrace, but he answered calmly,—

"No! the masterpiece, as you call it, is finished, though whether I shall induce any manager to accept it, remains to be seen."

"Have you tempted Fate with it, yet?"

"No! but I have submitted it to a good judge, whose decision has not yet been given; in a few days I may be able to tell you more."

"Have you shown it to Graystone?"

"No! my critic is a lady, but one well qualified to judge, as you will admit, when I tell you her name—Miss Adelaide Travers."

"What! Lady Macbeth?"

"The same; have you met her?"

"Only on the stage. You see I have not been much in London, and besides, I understood she was rather a hermit."

"Oh! that is quite a mistake; she visits freely, though naturally, I think, of a very retiring disposition. I must introduce you, you will be glad to know her; she is very beautiful, and her mental charms are fully equal to her physical ones."

"I shall be delighted to meet with such a paragon. To judge from your speech, one would almost fancy you were in love with the lady."

"What poor puppets we are after all; mere

marionettes, the strings of which seem pulled by the hand of a capricious fate."

Had Frank Gardiner boldly avowed the truth, and owned that he had long since lost his heart to the lovely actress whom they were discussing, what an amount of misery might have been spared both to himself and others.

But he was young, and a feeling of false shame held back the confession which trembled upon his lips. Somerset was his friend, tried and true, but even to him, he could not discover the delicious secret, which was locked so securely in his own breast.

So he treated the remark as a merry jest, and played his part so effectively that his friend never dreamed of the truth, and like most of his fellow men, Frank found, when too late, that a lost opportunity seldom returns.

Presently the conversation changed into another channel. They talked of Somerset's yacht and his racing-stud, for he was a great sportsman, and it was not until Frank rose to depart that Adelaide's name was again mentioned.

"By the way," said Somerset merrily, "do not forget to introduce me to Miss Travers; you have quite fired my curiosity, and besides, I am anxious to learn her opinion of your new play. If it is accepted, you should get her to undertake the principal part, that would go far towards making it a success."

Frank did not think it necessary to mention that he had written it specially with that object in view, though that was actually the case, and with Somerset's hearty good-night still ringing in his ears, he passed down the brilliantly lighted staircase, all unconscious of the terrible train he had so unwittingly laid.

In spite of the dreariness of the night, he felt in a joyous mood; Adelaide—he called her Adelaide to himself—had been unusually kind to him; his play, upon which he had expended so many anxious hours of care and thought, he believed would meet with her approval, and the recollection of the pleasant time spent in his old friend's society was still fresh in his mind.

Not even that historic cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, appeared to mar the blue of his sky, and it was with an unwonted sense of peace that he laid his head upon his pillow and fell into a quiet slumber.

CHAPTER II.

FRANK GARDINER was not after all to be the means of introducing the beautiful actress to his friend, a privilege reserved for Mrs. Irvine, the wife of the lessee of the theatre in which Adelaide was wont to enthral large and brilliant audiences.

Mrs. Irvine was a fascinating little woman with whom Adelaide was a great favourite, and the latter would often while away an hour in her friend's society.

A week had elapsed since Frank's chance encounter with Somerset, and the two ladies were seated in Mrs. Irvine's cosy drawing-room, enjoying a sociable chat, when Adelaide, whose position commanded a view from the window, suddenly exclaimed "Here is your husband, see he is bringing a visitor with him."

Her hostess laughed pleasantly. "That is like George," she said "it is really astonishing the number of people he manages to introduce to me in the course of the year; he is very catholic in his tastes. By the way, he tells me young Gardiner has been writing you a new play."

"Yes, and I rely upon your good offices to induce him to accept it; it is really a splendid piece."

"Oh! if you pronounce favourably upon it, that will decide George. But you are not going surely!" for Adelaide had risen, "stay, I will ring for tea; the men will probably not come in here; the stranger most likely is some business acquaintance, and George will take him into the study."

As it happened, however, Mr. Irvine conducted his companion straight to the drawing-room, and Adelaide finding it too late to effect her escape, quietly re-seated herself.

The lessee was a good-looking, merry featured

man with laughing eyes and pleasant, kindly smile. In reality, he was some few years older than his wife, but he carried his age so well, that those who did not know him intimately, spoke of him as still a young man.

"Mary, my dear," he began in a breezy fashion, "I have brought a friend in for a cup of your famous tea: I have been trying to persuade him to dine with us. Ah! Miss Travers, I beg your pardon, upon my word I did not notice you," and he glanced at Adelaide with a merry twinkle.

He shook hands with her cordially, and then turning to his guest, said, "Permit me to introduce you, Mr. Ralph Somerset—Mr. Somerset, my wife, and Miss Travers."

Ralph bowed courteously.

Mrs. Irvine expressed her pleasure at his visit, and Adelaide inclined her head with a stately grace.

The genial lessee placed a chair for his guest at Mrs. Irvine's side, and himself sat down by Adelaide whom he instantly drew into conversation.

The girl listened with a capital show of attention, though in truth she did not understand one single word of what he was saying; all her thoughts were centred in the man, to whom she had just been introduced.

He was a tall, athletic-looking man with a well-proportioned figure, and handsome face.

His hands, though shapely, were browned with exposure, and his complexion originally fair, had been tanned and roughened by the wind and rain, and the burning rays of a tropical sun.

His head was covered with short curly locks of brown hair, and his eyes were of the same colour.

His face was clean-shaven save for a heavy moustache, which together with his erect carriage, and quick, commanding air, gave him rather a military appearance.

Presently, tea was brought in and the conversation became general.

"It is rather singular," observed Ralph, addressing Adelaide, "that I should have been introduced to you just now, since it is only recently my friend Mr. Gardiner was speaking of you to me, in the most enthusiastic manner."

"Do you mean Frank Gardiner, the dramatist?" she asked, her heart fluttering violently.

"Yes! I believe he is a friend of yours. He was speaking of his new play, which you had kindly consented to read. May I venture to ask if your decision was a favourable one?"

"I can answer that question Mr. Somerset," interrupted the lessee, briskly; "Miss Travers thinks so well of it, that she is bent upon forcing me to produce it, and I expect I shall have to yield, though the risk is very great. Miss Travers has a pet theory, crazy I call it, that the stage, properly managed, can be made a tremendous lever for the moral elevation of the public, and I am the unfortunate manager she has selected as the means of performing her experiment."

The speaker assumed such a melancholy tone that his hearers laughed involuntarily, while Adelaide with mock indignation protested against the charge.

"But seriously," resumed Mr. Irvine, "this play of Gardiner's requires grave consideration; it may certainly prove a great success; on the other hand, even such a popular favourite as Miss Travers may not be able to save it from failure."

Ralph Somerset was an accomplished man of the world, and Adelaide's behaviour showed him plainly how much importance she attached to gaining the manager's consent.

He was, as a rule, far from hasty in his action, but now without pausing to consider the prudence or otherwise of his offer, he turned to Mr. Irvine, saying—

"If I understand you aright, and the only objection is a pecuniary one, I will gladly take that responsibility upon my own shoulders. Mr. Gardiner is a very old friend of mine, and I am deeply interested in his success; but of course the arrangement would be a strictly private one,

there would be no need to tell him anything about it!"

"In that case," responded the other, cheerfully, "we may count the matter as settled; it is certainly very kind of you," a sentiment, warmly endorsed by Mrs. Irvine, and more feebly echoed by Adelaide, who soon afterwards took her departure, Ralph expressing the hope that they might meet again.

"Miss Travers appears a trifle reserved," the young man ventured to remark, after she had gone, "is she always so cold?"

"Yes; except when with very intimate friends. She is a peculiar girl, but people whom she honours with her friendship grow quite fond of her!"

"That, I can easily believe," responded Ralph, with a meaning smile, "but now I must really wish you adieu; I have an important engagement to keep. By the way, push on with your arrangements as fast as you can, and if at any time you require me, a letter addressed to my club will reach me."

"That's a sort of friend worth cultivating," said Mr. Irvine, as they watched Ralph go down the street, but the little woman who stood by his side shook her head.

"You men are all alike," she cried, laughingly, "none of you ever can see farther than the end of your nose. Now if I were young Gardiner, I would rather see that man at the bottom of the ocean, than accept his offer of assistance."

"Well, upon my word, little woman, I fail to follow you. Surely a man who makes a magnificent offer like Somerset has just done, is worth having for one's friend."

"Everything depends upon the reason; now where you see only friendship, I detect something more. Did you not notice how very much taken with Adelaide this Mr. Somerset was? No, of course not; men never do, but it was not likely to escape me, and I tell you this offer of his was not altogether disinterested. He perceived how much Adelaide wished the play to be produced, and determined to make a bold stroke for her good-will."

"And in what way does that effect Frank?"

"Oh, you dear, silly goose! Have you not seen that the poor boy worships the very ground upon which she walks? Why, he is over head and ears in love with her."

Mr. Irvine looked perplexed and thoughtful.

"If your statement be correct," he said presently, "I am sorry for the lad; he will stand little chance against Ralph Somerset."

This latter gentleman meanwhile had returned to his hotel in a very confused state of mind.

Mrs. Irvine had not given him sufficient credit for his actual friendship towards Frank, but with that exception she had divined his motives with fair accuracy.

Even without Adelaide's presence, he would probably have pursued the same course, but in his heart he knew and admitted that his offer had been made, chiefly with the view of ingratiating himself with her.

Handsome, wealthy and accomplished, Ralph had been brought in contact with many beautiful women, but none had touched his heart like this lovely and talented actress.

"It is lucky," he murmured to himself, "that dear old Frank has not fallen in love with her, for much as I care for him, I really do not think I could give up my chance without a struggle. Fortunately, however, there can be no question of rivalry between us, though how he could manage to keep himself free I cannot imagine; still it is a good thing both for him and me. I suppose she will tell him to-night that Irvine has accepted his play, I trust for his sake, that it will prove successful. But I must not sit dreaming here, if I am to keep my appointment with Paterson, though it's a horrid bore," and he proceeded to dress for dinner.

When Adelaide returned to her own house that afternoon Mrs. Porter manifested a curiosity, exceedingly rare for that lady to exhibit, for as a general rule she gave but little heed to the comings and goings of her mistress.

On this particular occasion, however, she noticed with surprise that Adelaide's cheeks were unduly flushed, and that there was a

strange light in her eyes, as though something had occurred to excite her.

"Mr. Gardiner has not called during my absence, I suppose?" she asked, presently, in an odd, abrupt tone; and when her companion answered in the negative, she sat down to her writing-desk.

"He is safe to know," she muttered nervously, "and will willingly give me the information I desire."

Selecting a sheet of note-paper, she wrote—

"My dear Mr. Gardiner, I have had another interview with Mr. Irvine, concerning your play, which he has agreed to accept. Of course there are numerous matters of detail to be settled between you, but before calling upon Mr. Irvine, I shall be glad if you will come here. I shall be at liberty at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, if you can make that time convenient."

"Yours sincerely,

"ADELAIDE TRAVERS."

Ring the bell, she gave the letter to a servant to post, and soon afterwards, with an apology to Mrs. Porter, retired to her room.

She was evidently restless and excited, and her habitual calm had for the moment forsaken her.

Usually at this hour of the day she took a brief rest, in order to fortify herself for the exertions of the evening, but now, instead of seeking her couch, she walked rapidly to and fro with clenched hands and a gleam of passion in her eyes.

Nor did her excitement subside as the time approached for her to go out.

Brilliant as her theatrical representations had been hitherto, that night she surpassed herself; she improved even upon her own reputation.

There was a force, a fire, a nervous vigour, in which some of her detractors had asserted she was lacking.

Her magnificent voice had an intense ring in it, and once when she had to address a few lines of dismissal to a treacherous lover, the scornful denunciation was delivered with such passionate force and burning fervour, that the whole house rose to its feet and applauded her enthusiastically.

"It was simply superb," whispered Mr. Irvine, as he handed her to her carriage, "but I fear you have over-exerted yourself; you must endeavour to secure a good night's rest."

She looked at him with a peculiar smile on her face, which was still slightly flushed, but she made no reply, save to thank him for his attention, then as he raised his hat and the carriage moved off, she leaned back in the corner and closed her eyes.

When they arrived at Gloucester Terrace, she went straight to her room, resisting all Mrs. Porter's entreaties to partake of some refreshment before retiring. No, she said, she was not hungry, she felt no need for food, but her head ached, and she wished to be alone.

"I am very foolish to excite myself in this manner," she murmured, when at length she got into bed; "perhaps after all he is not the man, I will wait until I have seen Mr. Gardiner."

CHAPTER III.

It was the morning after Adelaide's introduction to Somerset, and Frank Gardiner had gone down to breakfast in a happy frame of mind. There was no particular reason for his light heartedness, but somehow he felt cheerful beyond his wont; and as he entered the room where his meal was prepared he could scarcely refrain from breaking into a merry tune.

A pile of letters was placed at the side of his plate, and these he proceeded to glance rapidly through.

The majority of them were of little moment; but presently he came to one which caused his eyes to shine more brightly still. It was from Mr. Irvine, and informed him that that gentleman had read his play, "A Noble Roman," and that he would be pleased to accept it, subject to certain conditions, which could easily be arranged at a subsequent interview.

The next was from Ralph, and was very brief.

"Dear Frank," it ran, "come and dine with me at the club this evening; I have something of importance to communicate."

"Ever yours,
"RALPH."

The sight of the last envelope brought a warm flush to his cheeks and caused his heart to beat violently. It was a dainty little note, and the address was in a lady's handwriting. He opened it eagerly, and as he mastered its contents, glanced anxiously at the clock.

"There is just time," he muttered, and ringing the bell, he desired the landlady to have a cab ready for him in half-an-hour's time.

Adelaide was waiting to receive him when he arrived at Gloucester Terrace, and he noticed instantly that she did not appear in her usual good health and spirits.

"Are you not well?" he asked nervously, for he looked at her with a lover's eyes which detected the slightest change.

"Oh, yes," she responded smilingly, "I am quite well, save for a trifling headache. I rather fatigued myself last evening, that is all. But you are standing; pray take a seat. I wish to have a long chat with you. And first let me congratulate you on the acceptance of your play."

"For which," he said, "I feel certain I am indebted to yourself."

"Not at all," as a matter of fact, I had really nothing to do with it, save to offer an opinion on its merits. But the great point is," she added, hastily, "that it is accepted, and now it remains for us to make it a success."

For some time they continued discussing the subject which was the ostensible cause of his visit, and it was not until they had exhausted it, that she remarked, in a casual way,—

"Oh, I did not see you I met an old friend of yours at Mr. Irvine's, Mr. Somerset. I believe you are rather intimate, are you not?"

"Yes, we are great chums, Ralph Somerset and I. I am glad you have met him, I wanted you to know each other. He is talking to him about you quite recently; he is a splendid fellow and exceedingly clever."

"Really!" she said, with perceptible interest, "what is his particular forte? Has he made a name for himself in any particular subject?"

Frank laughed.

"Well no," he said in answer to her question, "he is undeniably clever; but at the same time I must admit he is very lazy. The truth is," he added, "he lacks a *motif*, and without that, I fancy one rarely makes the best of things. I often tell him it is a pity he had not been born poor, for necessity would have developed his talents. He ought to have been an A.R.A. by now, for he has all the makings of a true artist."

"Does he paint, then?" It was a simple question, but there was an intense earnestness in the tone which she could not repress, and which made Frank glance towards her with a look of curiosity.

"Yes," he answered, "or, perhaps, I should say he did, for I believe he rarely touches a brush now. Some years back he displayed great enthusiasm for his art, but as I said, he has no *motif*. You see he is rich, consequently the acquisition of wealth would not attract him, and he has, I verily believe, not a single morsel of ambition."

"Does he live in London? I do not remember having met with him before."

"Oh no, he passes most of his time abroad, but his home is in Yorkshire; he is the owner of Oatleigh Grange."

A little exclamation burst from Adelaide's lips, and her face went deathly pale, but it was only for an instant. By a stupendous effort she stifled the wild beating of her heart, and almost before Frank had had time to note the change, her face had recovered its expression of habitual calm.

"After all," she said carelessly, "perhaps it is as well that your friend should not condescend to join in the fiercest struggle; it is one competitor

the less for those who are compelled to earn their daily bread."

"Yes," he assented, "I think sometimes that Ralph looks upon it in that light. But I must not trespass upon your kindness longer, your time is fully occupied I am aware," and he rose to go.

She wished him good-bye with a pleasant smile, but when he left the room, a hard, stern look overspread her face, and she walked mechanically to the window.

Her anticipation then had proved correct. From the first she had divined the information which Frank had just imparted; it remained now for her to consider what use she should make of it. She had not sought a meeting with this man, she had made no effort to seek him out; she had indeed purposely avoided mentioning his name; but now, without any will of her own, she had been brought face to face with him.

It was strange, she thought, that this man of all men in the world should voluntarily place himself in her path, and more curious still that he should have displayed such interest in her.

From her position Adelaide was necessarily a woman of experience, and the hidden reason of Ralph's offer on behalf of his friend had not escaped her.

Without being vain, she knew perfectly well that she was beautiful, and that he had been attracted by her charms. It almost seemed as if he himself were pointing out the method of his punishment, and her eyes sparkled.

Adelaide Travers was not naturally a vindictive woman, she would not willingly have hurt the lowliest creature in God's creation, but this man was different; he had done a grievous wrong, and thus far had escaped punishment. Now he had been committed into her hands, and she would take vengeance.

It scarcely needed any planning or contriving; the whole thing lay mapped out so clearly, that she could not go wrong. Already she had inspired him with a feeling of regard and she would take care that it did not languish. She would feed the fire thus so providentially ignited; she would ply him with a woman's arts; lure him with a woman's smiles; she would force him to love her with a passion from which he could never set himself free, and then would come the day of her triumph.

Standing there, gazing abstractedly into the street, she conjured up the picture which she herself would make a reality. She saw this strong, rich, handsome man at her feet, his eyes filled with passion; pleading in passionate tones that she would take pity upon him, that she would give him one single morsel of comfort. Then, as in a glass, she looked at her own face, beautiful but cold, as she answered him with scornful mocking words.

"You do not know me, Mr. Ralph Somerset of Oatleigh Grange," she would say; "it is time you should. It is time for this pretty farce to be ended, that you should learn for once in your life that a woman can be as false as a man. Look at me, Mr. Ralph Somerset, to the world I am Adelaide Travers, the actress; but once I was Adelaide Dynevor, the miller's daughter at Tattershall!"

Then she would laugh at his misery and let him go to eat out his heart with rage and mortification, conscious that he could never break the silken cords with which she had bound him.

Yes! it was a pretty scheme, if only she could summon the necessary courage to carry it through. She was a tender-hearted woman after all, totally unsuited to the character she proposed to play, but she thought of the old home at Tattershall, and the remembrance of the misery into which that peaceful household had been plunged, steeled her heart, and she resolved that cost what it might she would not falter in her resolution.

Meanwhile Frank Gardiner was returning home with a peculiar feeling of uncertainty and dissatisfaction, for which he could scarcely account. The mere idea of an interview with Adelaide had been sufficient to fill him with happiness. Yet now that he had seen her, he was decidedly uncomfortable. It was as if he

had been unexpectedly subjected to a cold bath and had not recovered from it.

What had happened, he asked himself, to cause this alteration in her? Adelaide had been kind to him; kinder even than he had expected her to be; yet at the same time there was something in her manner which puzzled him.

He went carefully over the incidents of the morning; reviewed each little speech, called to mind each look and gesture, and as the result of his meditation found himself more hopelessly entangled than before.

Two things however grew clear upon his vision and demanded his attention; her unusual excitement, and the strange persistence with which she had interrogated him concerning Somerset.

The first he had noticed and wondered at in the morning; it was so unlike Adelaide, who generally preserved a calm and impassive countenance under all circumstances. But the second idea only now occurred to him, and it increased his anxiety. Why should she trouble herself about Somerset, and more particularly about his social position? He was almost a complete stranger to her. She had seen him but once, and then for a brief period.

Had she been any other woman than Adelaide Travers, he could doubtless have invented some plausible reason; his handsome face, his fascinating manner, a thousand and one trifles in which a woman can be interested.

But Adelaide was so different from ordinary women! It was scarcely conceivable that one so haughty and reserved, so cold that men even spoke of her as the "Snow woman" should have been melted so quickly by the blandishments of his handsome friend.

And yet he could not get away from the fact that she had manifested an extraordinary interest in Ralph, and his heart grew sad as he reluctantly admitted it.

He loved this woman with a brave true love in which there was no taint of selfishness, and it was a terrible trial to confront the half-formed suspicion that was slowly growing up in his mind.

But painful as it was he could not banish it; all through the day it haunted him, recurring again and again with ever-increasing force as though some mocking spirit were standing at his side poisoning his peace with insidious questions.

"What folly!" it seemed to say, "thus to blind yourself to a self-evident truth! Why should this woman differ from others! Do you think she has no heart to be touched by love's arrows, when the blind god draws his bow! There is no difficulty but of your own making. Out of a poor piece of common clay you have fashioned an ideal woman, and set it high upon a stately pedestal. Is it the idol's fault that it is not perfect! As well be angry with the molten image of some old pagan, because it is not made of pure gold. You have formed and fashioned your idol; you have glazed your red clay to make it appear porcelain, and now that the surface is beginning to warp and crack you are angry."

It was very stupid of him no doubt; but he was young and in love, and the suspicion that Adelaide was not superior to the foibles of her sex hurt him.

Presently he grew calmer. He remembered Ralph's invitation, and resolved that he would banish the subject until he had seen his friend.

CHAPTER IV.

For the first time since the commencement of their acquaintanceship the two friends met each other with a certain feeling of restraint, though each strove hard to brush aside the shadowy wall that had sprung up between them.

Frank's mind, of course, was full of Adelaide's unusual behaviour; and Ralph, on his part, felt a little uneasy when he reflected upon his offer to Mr. Irvine, and the motive which had prompted it.

He was not a man, perhaps, of the most delicate scruples; but Frank was his friend, and he could not altogether satisfy his conscience when he remembered that he had used his friendship as a cloak for an ulterior design.

Certainly he would have made his offer for Frank's sake alone; but he had not done so, and he did not attempt to disguise the fact.

They talked about the weather and the opera, the latest scandal, the state of politics, and the chances of the defeat of the ministry; but it was not until the evening had far advanced that the subject uppermost in the mind of each was introduced.

Ralph was the first to take the plunge.

"By the way," he said, lightly, "I have seen this incomparable actress of yours. Strange, is it not, that after all you should not be the means of introducing us? I met Irvine yesterday, with whom you know I have a casual acquaintance, and he insisted upon taking me to his house. I tried to get away, pleaded a previous engagement; but it was of no use, he carried me off, and when we found Miss Travers there you may be sure I forgave him."

"I understood from Miss Travers that she met you at the Irvines. I was at her house this morning, she wished to tell me that Irvine had consented to undertake the production of my play."

"Let me congratulate you, my boy. Will Miss Travers be the heroine?"

"Yes, she has accepted the part, and it is to be put in hand immediately."

"Then you may count on a glorious success I am sure. I was rather tempted to smile the other evening at your praises of her, but I recant my opinion now. She is indeed rarely beautiful and fascinating."

"I think you said you had never met before."

"Only at the theatre; never as a private acquaintance."

Frank gazed at him earnestly. He was certainly handsome, and the world knew he was rich. Had either of these things anything to do with Adelaide's interest in him?

Suddenly he remembered Ralph had told him he was going to start in a few days for Algiers, and assuming a careless tone, he said,—

"Have you completed the arrangements for your trip?"

Ralph's face flushed, and he hesitated a moment before answering.

"I think," he said, slowly, and as if with reluctance, "I shall not go abroad this winter. In fact I have almost made up my mind to stay on in London."

The other's face expressed such unequivocal surprise that the speaker laughed heartily.

"There is nothing definitely settled," he continued; "but I am getting tired of travel. I suppose it is a symptom of old age—a reminder that I am fast approaching the time when I shall have to look forward to the 'sere and yellow leaf.'"

He spoke lightly, and with an air of comical amusement, but his listener was not deceived. Frank knew his friend well, and he realized that this sudden abandonment of all his carefully laid plans was no light matter, that, in fact, nothing but a motive of the very gravest import could have occasioned it.

And could he doubt the reason which had led to this startling change? As he walked home that night he asked himself the question, and the answer was so apparent, that, distasteful as it was, he could not refuse to accept it.

It was quite clear that his friend had fallen in love with the beautiful woman whom he had hoped to secure for himself, and the recollection of his interview with Adelaide made him believe that already she was prepared to look upon his wooing with favour.

As the days passed, the truth of his surmise grew more and more plain. To the young author it almost seemed as if a miracle had been worked on behalf of his handsome rival. The imperious beauty, so calm, so stately, and so reserved hitherto, seemed to have changed her nature. The icicle had thawed, or, as Irvine expressed it, the marble statue had suddenly become endowed with life.

And unfortunately the influence was not far to seek. People smiled and shrugged their shoulders when they saw Adelaide and Ralph together. Those who knew her best rejoiced at the change, and were honestly glad that she

evinced such pleasure in the society of Ralph Somerset.

A few of the more envious sneered maliciously, and openly said that the broad lands of Oatleigh Grange would be a rich prize for even the popular actress.

To Frank himself it was incomprehensible. Adelaide, he knew, was already rich, and even had wealth been her object, she could have done infinitely better than by becoming the mistress of Oatleigh Grange.

Even Ralph found it difficult to believe in his own good fortune. By this time he was hopelessly in love, and though far from being conceited, he could scarcely doubt Adelaide in some sort returned his affection. She was always pleased to see him, and in his capacity of Frank's friend he found many opportunities of meeting her. But he was a cautious man, and the very magnitude of the stakes for which he was playing prevented him from bringing matters to a crisis.

Once or twice he was tempted to risk everything and avow the passion which was consuming him, but the thought of the blank despair into which his life would be plunged by a refusal, unnerved him and made him afraid to speak.

But perhaps the person most mystified at this time by Adelaide's behaviour was Mrs. Porter. Hitherto that lady's office had been a mere sinecure. Life to her, for many years, had been a continual round of eating, sleeping, and reading, without a single care.

Nominally she was Adelaide's companion, but save for attending her to the theatre there had been little for her to do. Strong, self-reliant and devoted to her art, Adelaide had always been sufficient unto her self, and had rarely troubled Mrs. Porter for her company.

Since Mr. Somerset's advent, however, the elder lady observed with surprise that her mistress sought her society more and more, and seemed to dread being left alone. Once, too, after Ralph had been there, she found her stretched on the couch, with flushed cheeks and eyes red from weeping, a sight she had never witnessed before, and it frightened her.

Being a wise woman in her generation, she affected not to notice anything unusual, but the circumstance fixed itself upon her mind and troubled her. In a quiet undemonstrative manner she was very fond of Adelaide, and this new phase of affairs cost her considerable anxiety.

One night after they had returned from the theatre, and were sitting down to a cosy little supper, she said carelessly,—

"I did not see Mr. Somerset this evening."

"No! he was not there."

"Hum!" soliloquized the old lady, "she noticed his absence, too, that's a bad sign."

Aloud she remarked,—

"Have you ever noticed what a handsome man he is?"

"Yes," listlessly, "people call him good-looking, I believe, but what makes you discuss Mr. Somerset now?"

The old lady paused to think. Should she speak the truth? Should she give rein to the ideas flashing through her brain? After all, perhaps, it was no business of hers. If Adelaide chose to take her into her confidence, well and good, but if not, ought she to try and force her secret?

Presently she said tentatively,—

"I suppose his frequent visits here caused me to think of him. Has it not struck you that he comes here very frequently?"

"Yes! he takes a great interest in Mr. Gardiner's play; they are very intimate you know, and he comes to consult me about it."

"Nonsense! Adelaide," returned Mrs. Porter sharply, "do you really imagine I am so blind as that? The man does not come for that reason at all, and you know it. He comes here upon your account. Everyone knows he is madly in love with you; his hope of making you his wife is public property."

Adelaide shivered violently though the room was warm, and a bright fire burned in the grate.

"Do you believe that?" she asked. "Do you really believe he will ask me to marry him?"

"Of course I do. The man does not attempt to conceal his passion; it is apparent to the world."

Again the shivering fit appeared to seize the girl, but she said with a forced calmness,—

"I think you are mistaken. At least it will be better for him if your supposition should be incorrect."

Mrs. Porter looked up in undisguised astonishment.

"You surprise me," she answered frankly. "I quite thought you intended to marry him."

"I shall never marry, neither Mr. Somerset nor any other man."

She spoke with such evident sincerity that her companion did not pursue the subject further, and shortly afterwards Adelaide retired to her room. She was very pale, and her eyes were filled with a sad, pained expression, as she sat down with a sigh of weariness in an easy chair.

"It is very hard," she murmured pitifully. "I cannot bear it. Oh, Ralph, Ralph, my punishment will be greater than yours; would to Heaven, we had never met."

Half-an-hour later, Mrs. Porter, passing the room on her way to bed, heard a low sobbing cry, and knocked gently at the door to ask if she could be of any service. By a strong effort Adelaide forced back her tears and sent her away, saying it was nothing, her head pained her, but she would be well in the morning.

"It is very strange," mused the old lady, when she reached her room, "I cannot understand it. I believe she loves the man, but it is certain, from the way she spoke to-night, that she does not intend to marry him."

The next morning when Ralph called, Adelaide had not yet risen, but Mrs. Porter received him in the drawing-room.

"Miss Travers is not ill, I hope," he asked anxiously, and a spasm of fear shot across his face, as he put the question.

"Oh, no! nothing serious," responded his companion; "she has had a restless night, and I advised her to keep her bed this morning. She has just fallen into a sound sleep, which will do her a world of good."

"I fear she over exerts herself, it is a pity she cannot be persuaded to rest; could you not use your influence with her, Mrs. Porter?"

"What! to induce her to give up her profession?"

"Yes! she must give it up, some day, you know."

"I think not," answered the lady quietly, "she will never give it up."

He smiled, with just the faintest possible tinge of self-satisfaction.

"Oh, nonsense," he said, with a light laugh.

"You are forgetting that Miss Travers is a young and beautiful woman, and that one day some man will lead her to the altar as his bride; she will not remain Miss Travers for ever."

Mrs. Porter looked him straight in the face as she answered deliberately,—

"I do not think my mistress will ever marry."

"Never marry!" he echoed, "why not? why should she not marry?"

"I do not know, but that is my conviction," and more than that she would not say.

All the remainder of the day the old lady's words kept ringing in Ralph's ears, and though he laughed at the whole thing as an absurd freak, and was angry with himself for allowing it to trouble him, he could not help feeling strangely uncomfortable.

"I will speak out," he said to himself that night, "I will make an opportunity and ask her to be my wife; this suspense is becoming intolerable. And I believe she loves me, my proud, beautiful darling! Surely I cannot have been mistaken! Why should I be afraid? Never marry! pshaw, that wretched old woman must be entering into her dotage."

CHAPTER V.

"Do you think she will marry him, Mrs. Irvine? He is a splendid fellow, and just the man I should fancy to make her happy."

Frank Gardiner was enjoying a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Irvine. He was a friend of several years standing, and of late he had taken to discussing his griefs and cares with the lessee's wife, for her kindness and womanly sympathy soothed him.

"Poor old Frank!" she said, in answer to his question, "have you then given up all hope? Remember the battle is never lost until it is won, and 'Faint heart never won fair lady'; though I fear I can hold out but little hope of success."

"That means you believe she will accept his offer. Well, your opinion coincides with mine. I have expected it from the first, and Ralph is a good fellow, he deserves to be happy."

"Perhaps so, but it is a tremendous pity that what constitutes his happiness should form your misery. I have no word to say against Somerset, but for your sake I wish devoutly that George had never brought him here."

Frank smiled feebly.

"You need not reproach him with that; he but anticipated my own design."

"Well," responded his friend cheerfully, "I would not give up in despair yet. 'There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip,' you know, and this may be a case in point. However, you must excuse me now, I am sorry to send you away, but I must show myself at the Tailleur's. George has promised to call there for me, on his return from the theatre. What do you propose doing with yourself?"

"Go and bury myself in my den," he answered moodily, "and smoke. I do not feel equal to the demands of society just at present."

She shook her head warningly.

"Do not grow misanthropical, or at least wait until the affair is definitely decided."

"Poor Frank," she murmured softly, as she proceeded to her room to dress. "I fear he is crying for the moon, and yet Adelaide might have done worse, but evidently she intends to become Mrs. Ralph Somerset."

Meanwhile Frank had wandered out into the crowded street with a mind ill at ease. He loved Adelaide with all the strength of a brave, true-hearted man, and it was with a feeling of bitterness he realised that she was slipping away from him, passing rapidly out of his life.

He did not blame Ralph; he acknowledged to himself that his friend had behaved neither unfairly nor dishonourably, and he could not be angry with him for having fallen in love with Adelaide; still he felt irritated and unhappy.

He walked on scarcely heeding whether his footsteps led him, until suddenly he found himself in a long narrow street to which he was a stranger.

It was evidently a poor neighbourhood; the houses though lofty were old and in various stages of decay, and the doorsteps were crowded with knots of disreputable men and slovenly women. Dozens of squalid, ragged children were playing in the roadway, while others cumbered the pavement.

The young man was about to retrace his steps in order to beat a retreat from this unenviable district, when a cry of distress in the thin piping treble of a young child made him pause.

A few yards further down the street was a huge gin palace, the folding doors of which seemed ever swinging to and fro, to allow the ingress and egress of a busy stream of people.

It was from this quarter the cry had come, and looking down he saw a little fellow lying on the pavement with a broken cup in his hand. A stream of blood was flowing from a nasty gash in his cheek, and he was screaming lustily.

Half a dozen ragged urchins were gathered round, jeering and mocking at his distress, and a man who stood leaning against the wall, with his hands in his pockets, and smoking a short black pipe, bade him gruffly get up and take himself off.

Being tender-hearted and fond of children, Frank strode down to the little chap, and lifted him from the stones.

"What is the matter, my man?" he asked in a pleasant voice, which immediately won the little one's confidence.

The weeping ceased as if by magic, and looking up into the face of his new found friend he said frankly—

"I have broken Granny's cup, and she will beat me."

"Oh, but it was not your fault," exclaimed Frank; "how came you to tumble?"

"My foot slipped and I fell, and Granny will beat me awful."

"Who is your Granny?"

"Granny."

This did not sound very promising, so Frank shifted his ground.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Dick."

"Yes," he said, "Dick—and what else?"

"I haven't got no other name. I'm Granny's Dick," and the sudden remembrance of the coming flogging, brought the tears into his eyes again.

The gas from the shop threw a bright light outside, and Frank scanned the child's face in surprise. He was apparently about six years old, a fair, flaxen-haired boy, with sharp blue eyes, and although dressed in rags and covered with dirt, he presented evidence of refinement and good birth.

"Poor little beggar," Frank muttered to himself, "I have a good mind to go home with him and save him from the beating. I say Dick, will you show me where you live? I'll carry you."

Dick grinned delightedly.

"Down here," he said, pointing with a very dirty forefinger; "shall you tell Gran it was not my fault?"

Frank nodded assent and set off on his strange mission, followed by the wild shouts of the gamins, who had been listening with wide-open mouths to the conversation.

It was a novel sight to the denizens of Water Lane, this handsome, well-dressed gentleman carrying a dirty urchin with cut cheek, and they gave expression to their surprise in forcible and pertinent language; but Frank trudged manfully on fully determined to see the matter to the end.

Presently, obeying the signals of his guide, he turned into a narrow alley compared with which Water Lane was a veritable paradise.

There was no pavement, and the road was littered with rotten vegetables and refuse of every description. The hovels—they could not be called houses—were falling in pieces, the windows were uniformly destitute of glass, for which old newspapers and many-coloured rags had been substituted, and the doors stood wide open.

Frank grew sick at heart, he had never seen such a sight, and when, at the end of the alley, his conductor stopped, and was gently lifted down, the young man was horrified.

"Down these steps," whispered Dick, nervously, "and mind, cos perhaps, she will fling something."

Hand in hand they descended a flight of filthy steps, which led into a still more filthy passage, and opening a door, Dick said, "Now go in, this is where Gran lives."

Frank did go in, and he has not forgotten the sight to this day. A small room with what had once been a flagstone flooring; the walls bare, save for the accumulations of dirt and discoloured patches, and festoons of spiders' webs. A rickety three-legged deal table, a broken fire-grate destitute of fuel, a tallow-candle stuck in an old bottle, a Windsor chair without a back, and, to crown all, a heap of evil-smelling straw in one corner.

On the chair, rocking her body to and fro, was an old woman, whose hideous aspect filled him with disgust. She turned her head at his approach, and rose from the chair.

"What do you want?" she screamed rather than asked.

He tried to speak pleasantly, but it cost him a great effort to answer with a smile.

"Your little boy has met with an accident, and I have brought him home. He has fallen and cut his cheek, see!" and he pointed to Dick's face.

"And lost my money I'll be bound; Dick, you young wretch, have you lost the money?"

Alas! for Granny's Dick! the childish hand opened and shut nervously, it was only too plain that the precious coppers had disappeared. Before, however, the coming storm had time to gather to a head Frank interposed: "Pardon me,"

he said, "but if you will allow me, I will act as my little friend's banker, and put his affairs right," at the same time placing a little silver on the table.

The old hag snatched it up greedily as if fearful lest he should alter his mind, and turning to the boy, Frank said, "Now, Dick, I have made peace with your grandmother; you must be more careful next time. A likely-looking boy," he added to the old woman, "is he your daughter's child?"

"No!" she growled sullenly, "he's none of mine, though I've had the keeping of him, worse luck!"

Frank did not say any more, but having washed the cut, and bound it up with his handkerchief he took his leave.

Frank Gardiner did not lay claim to the title of philanthropist, but he possessed a tender heart, and the vision of Dick's face haunted him all night. There was some mystery about him, that he felt sure; his very appearance showed he had nothing in common with the horrible old woman whom he called Granny, and the longer Frank pondered, the greater grew his pity for the poor little, left to the tender mercies of this miserable hag.

The result of all this cogitation was a second visit to the squalid den which constituted the child's home. Dick was out, but the old lady bade him enter when he knocked at the door, and received him with a ferocious scowl, which she apparently intended for a complimentary grin.

Frank was resolved to waste no time; he had determined to rescue Dick from his degraded surroundings, and he had his plans laid out.

"You did not expect to see me again," he began, "I am come to make you an offer. It is about that little chap I brought home the other night, where is he?"

"How do I know! Out in the streets somewhere."

"Well, I wish to take him away from here, and get him into a decent home, where he will have a chance of learning to live respectably. Do you understand?"

She might have understood, but her face was like that of the Sphinx, so Frank continued.

"It will be no loss to you, he's only an expense now. I'll take him off your hands, I'll feed him, clothe him, and set him up in the world."

Frank had reckoned upon encountering a certain amount of opposition, but he was totally unprepared for the question she now put to him.

"Are you his father?" she asked, stolidly, "because, if so, I shall expect to be paid for all the expense I have been at in bringing him up."

The laugh with which he greeted her question was so natural and genuine that the look of excitement, which had crept into her eyes, died out again, and she murmured: "No, you are a swell, you are, with plenty of money, and that's what he had precious little of, I should say; but you ought to give me something for my trouble."

He took five sovereigns from his purse and held them in his hand.

"There," he exclaimed, "if you let Dick come with me, without any fuss, you shall have these; if you make any trouble, you shall not have a penny, and I shall take the boy all the same. Which is it to be?"

"Give me the money," she said sullenly.

"Not yet, I'll wait until Dick comes in, I'm going to take him away at once. While I'm waiting you can tell me all you know about his friends; the information may prove useful. At any rate, if ever I find the boy's father, and he is in a good position, you shall not be forgotten."

He took out his note-book and jotted down the heads of her story as she related it, but in truth she had very little to tell.

"Well," he said, when she finished, "there is not much in that. A strange woman dies in your house and leaves a baby of which you take charge. You did not live here then, did you?" glancing round the foul-smelling room.

"No," with a sudden upspringing of pride; "I was better off in those days, and lived in a decent house, not in a pig-stye. But I forgot the papers," she added, "not that they are likely to be of much use, still you may as well have them," and, crossing to the cupboard, she reached from

the top shelf an old cigar-box; "they are no good to me, I can't read."

Just as he took the papers from her grimy hand the door opened very cautiously, and two bright blue eyes were seen peering in. At sight of Frank the owner of the eyes entered boldly and came up to him with an eager smile.

"Is it you?" he asked. "I like you; did you come to see if I had falled down again?"

"No, my little man; I have come to take you away, where you will have some nice food, and some new clothes, and pretty toys; will you come with me?"

The blue eyes danced with pleasure, and a thin hand stole into Frank's; there was no need for words.

Frank gave the old woman the promised money, and telling her she should learn from time to time how the boy was, he marched out, holding Dick tightly with one hand and the cigar-box with the other.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Frank Gardiner took Dick away from the wretched court, he had no idea he was doing anything beyond rescuing a singularly attractive City arab from a life of misery; so little do we know what may result from our most simple and trifling actions.

He had arranged with his landlady that Dick should be placed in her charge for a few days, until he had fully considered what course should be pursued concerning him.

It was getting dusk when the oddly assorted pair reached the house, which perhaps for the credit of the neighbourhood was not an unmixed evil, for Dick, in his then condition, was not precisely the kind of boy to add to one's reputation.

Mrs. Stokes, Frank's landlady, raised her eyes and invoked the aid of her tutelary saint when she beheld the ragged little object; but the worthy woman's heart was in the right place, and in an incredibly short time, by the liberal use of soap and water and by dint of vigorous scrubbing, she had so changed his outward appearance that Granny would have rubbed her eyes in astonishment. Then she brought out a pretty sailor suit, which fitted him capitally, and thus metamorphosed she took him up to Frank's room.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, "is this Dick? Why, Mrs. Stokes, he looks a different being altogether!" which indeed he did. The air of refinement which had been dimly perceptible even through his dirt, was now clearly discernible, and Frank felt convinced that there was some mystery attached to the child.

He had no engagement that evening; and after Dick, tired but triumphant, had been carried off to bed, he got down the cigar-box and drew his chair to the fire, intending to spend an hour in attempting to trace Dick's parentage.

He was not in a great hurry to begin; he had no especial motive save curiosity to satisfy, for he did not expect to obtain any important result. From the old woman's remarks he had pieced out a story in his own mind, a story commonplace enough, and which needed but little investigation. Still it would be as well to ascertain what he could, and with that idea he drew the box towards him and opened it.

There is something peculiarly saddening in the sight of letters written by those who have since passed away. What a host of memories the words of our beloved dead galvanise into life! What hopes and fears! what joys and sorrows! Alas! at times what misery and despair! Even when the handwriting is that of a total stranger, I think this feeling is not quite lost.

Frank sighed as he looked at the papers, the ink faded, the characters in some places almost illegible, what secret had they to reveal? Lying crosswise at one end of the box was a small parcel, containing, perhaps, half-a-dozen letters neatly tied with a faded ribbon, and a long oblong envelope occupied the centre.

It seemed a kind of sacrilege to touch them; but there was just a chance that, for Dick's sake,

it would be better to ascertain their contents. He took the letters first and read them through. With one exception the envelopes had been destroyed, and that one was addressed to Miss Marie Dynevor, The Post Office, Taunton.

They were all alike couched in terms of undying affection, and the writer subscribed himself Dick. On one point only was Frank surprised; the mysterious Dick was evidently a well-educated man, and one accustomed to move in good society.

"Poor Marie!" he murmured softly, as he laid the last letter down. "Poor Marie! I fear my picture was painted in too bright a colour after all."

Then he took up the oblong packet and opened it; perhaps here he should learn the real secret.

As he read its contents, he uttered an exclamation which sounded almost like an expression of relief, but the next moment he started with an unequivocal cry of pain.

"Is it possible?" he said to himself, "surely I must be dreaming!" and he peered closely at the paper, as if he thought the characters might change their form.

For nearly an hour he sat staring into the fire, dazed.

He could not think, his brain was dizzy, his head in a whirl.

After the first shock, he only knew in a confused way that something was wrong, something had happened, and that a terrible responsibility was laid upon his shoulders.

Presently he looked at the paper again and shuddered.

Yes, he knew now what he had to do, the wrong must be set right, there could be no question as to that.

Still it seemed very hard that it had fallen to his lot. His kind heart had prompted him to do a generous action and this was the result.

His first thought was of Adelaide and to what degree it would affect her; his second of Ralph, to whom this discovery must inevitably prove so disastrous.

Then another idea flashed into his mind and made him more wretched still.

If he did his duty, and made public the facts of his discovery, what would the world say? What would Ralph himself say? Would not the motive of his action be misconstrued?

Many of his friends knew of his love for Adelaide, and regarded Ralph in the light of his successful rival.

Might they not imagine that he had unearthed this wretched story for the purpose of revenge? that he had been actuated by a base spirit of enmity in the matter? that had not Ralph been likely to have secured the prize, nothing would have been found out?

Was it likely that anyone would believe it to have been purely a matter of chance?

He was afraid not, yet his duty lay clearly before him, and he could not shrink it.

Ralph must be told, Adelaide be warned, that much was certain; the rest was not for him. He would complete his proofs in the morning, it would not take long, and then he would seek an interview with Ralph.

He carried the papers to his desk, and locked them away securely; then with a heavy heart he sought his bed.

At the same time the next morning that Frank Gardiner stepped into a carriage on the Metropolitan Railway, Ralph was being shown into the drawing-room at Gloucester Terrace.

Adelaide was alone, and as he bade her "Good-morning," her face crimsoned with excitement.

She realised instantly that the supreme moment had arrived, the moment to which she had been looking forward with such intense eagerness, but her features bore little trace either of joy or triumph.

A cold chill seized her as he pressed her hand, and she feared she would have fallen.

She was beginning to learn by bitter experience, that revenge is a costly luxury, not lightly to be indulged in.

Ralph noted her agitation and felt encouraged.

He had come resolved to speak plainly, he could bear the suspense no longer.

"You are surprised to see me," he began, "but there is something I wish particularly to say to you. Pardon me if I seem abrupt, but I must speak now. Adelaide, am I wrong in supposing that you have guessed my secret? I think, nay I feel sure that what I have to say, will not be altogether unexpected to you. From the day when I first saw you I have loved you, and now I am come to ask you to be my wife. Adelaide, darling, can you bid me hope? I can give you wealth, position, and a good name, but better than all those, I can give you the true love of an honest man."

He did not notice the dangerous glitter of her eyes, as he uttered those last few words.

Until then she had not been sure of herself, she had feared rather lest she might break down, but those words gave her the courage she needed, and mentally she thanked him.

"My darling," she continued, passionately, "speak to me, answer me, give me one ray of hope, that some day you will be my wife. Oh, Adelaide, if you but guessed the torture, which your silence causes, you would have pity, and tell me that at least you do not look upon my—my pleading with indifference."

She stood before him, majestic in her imperious beauty; the erstwhile soft, dreamy eyes flashing with scorn; her face, cold and white and hard.

"Mr. Ralph Somerset," she said, and he could scarcely believe his ears, so harsh and pitiless were her tones, "I fear you have committed a grievous error. Do you know who I am?"

His astonishment was too great for speech, and she went on—

"To you and to the world, I am Adelaide Travers, the popular actress, but I have another name; can you not guess it?"

"Nay," he exclaimed, helplessly, "what has your name to do with it? I love you, Adelaide, do you not understand? I care nothing for your name; it is you, my beloved, your own sweet peerless self."

She laughed mockingly.

"Wait," she cried, "my name has much to do with you; listen, Adelaide Travers is really Adelaide Dynevor. Shall I tell you more? Will it please you to hear the whole wretched story again? Shall I take you back in memory to the quiet, peaceful village, where John Dynevor the miller lived, in his simple homely fashion, happy in the love and affection of his two girls?"

"Do you not remember how Mr. Somerset, of Otleigh Grange, the wandering artist, entered that quiet home, and made love to the beautiful, innocent girl who was the joy of her father's heart? And she, ignorant of evil, believed him!"

"We did not meet then, Mr. Ralph Somerset; I was away, but perhaps you would like to see the letter which called me home, written with the heart's blood of one of the truest men on God's earth. She was gone then, my sweet Marie, and gone for ever."

"Did you ever wonder what happened to the old man? Shall I tell you? He died within the week, mad, raving mad, cursing with his last breath the villain who had robbed him of his daughter."

"Have I made my story plain? Do you realise it is Marie Dynevor's sister you are asking to be your wife? Since I first saw you, I have prayed for this day. I am not ashamed to confess that I purposely led you on, that you might learn what a woman wronged can be."

The man had not stirred, and now he stood gazing at her as if fascinated. Presently his lips parted, and she heard him mutter.

"Good Heaven, how horrible!"

"Well," she cried, "are you not satisfied?"

He did not appear to see her, but murmured, as if to himself.

"My poor darling, my poor wronged darling; oh! that you had told me this sooner, what misery it might have prevented. Adelaide look at me! At the time of which you speak, I was not Mr. Somerset of Otleigh Grange, and I never heard of Marie Dynevor in my life until now."

it must have been my cousin Richard, at whose death I came into the property."

The unhappy woman stared at him for a moment in doubt, and then with a scream of agony fell forward in a swoon.

Ralph rang the bell hastily, and when Mrs. Porter came,—

"Miss Travers has had a fit," he said, "get her to bed, I am going for a doctor."

He had received a severe shock, but he knew that was not the time to succumb, and leaving the room quickly, he ran for the nearest medical man, who immediately accompanied him to Gloucester-terrace.

"I will remain here," he said, when they reached the house, "until you have seen her."

Presently the doctor reappeared.

"There is no danger," he said, cheerfully, "a day or two's quiet will completely restore her, and I have ordered Mrs. Porter to keep her in bed. I will call again in the morning, though I do not apprehend that any further services will be required."

Ralph thanked him mechanically, and walked away in the direction of his rooms, his mind relieved of one great dread.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER leaving Gloucester-terrace, Ralph walked the streets like a man in a dream, bowing courteously to his numerous acquaintances, and once or twice even engaging in conversation, though scarcely conscious of the sound of his own voice.

At length he reached his room, and, locking the door, sat down. He pressed his hand to his temples as if to still the violent throbbing. What had happened? Ah, yes, he remembered now; Adelaide had refused him. He had staked all upon a single throw, and lost.

Slowly and by degrees the painful story came back to him, and he shuddered at the remembrance. He felt no anger at his treatment, only a great wave of pity for the poor girl who had punished him so terribly for another's crime.

Not for an instant did it occur to him to question the identity of her sister's betrayer with his cousin Richard, although he had had no previous knowledge of the facts. The whole tenor of the story fitted in well with the dead man's character; so far as Richard was concerned the revelation did not surprise him.

But what of himself? What of the bright pictures he had painted so joyously that very morning? Was it that morning? It might have been years ago so strangely numbed were his feelings. Adelaide had rejected his suit; she had never even loved him; her simulated interest had been a mask to lure him to his ruin. And she had been successful! She had calculated rightly upon the strength of his passion. Even now he loved her as madly, as devotedly as ever, and he knew that his affection would never lessen until his dying day.

That was the constant burden of his thoughts. He loved her, this beautiful woman who had dealt him such a deadly blow, and his love would end only with life.

Towards the evening he heard the sound of familiar footsteps on the stairs, and recognised Frank's voice inquiring if he were at home.

"Come in," he cried in answer to the knock at the door, and he rose wearily to welcome his friend.

Frank took his proffered hand and paused irresolutely.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "What has happened? You look quite ill."

Ralph pointed to a chair.

"Sit down," he said, "I am not unwell, only I have had a disagreeable experience. I will explain presently."

Frank sat down filled with wonder and waited for his friend to speak. Had he seen Adelaide? Had the secret in some mysterious manner leaked out? He scarcely knew what to think, for he did not dream that Adelaide would refuse her handsome lover.

Meanwhile, Ralph was debating how much he should relate of his interview with Adelaide. He himself would frankly have told everything, for

he knew his friend's loyalty; but the secret was not his, and he finally decided to mention nothing more than the bare fact of his rejection.

Frank received the information with mingled feelings of amazement and relief. He was sorry for Ralph, but at the same time it simplified matters very much. He could now disclose the secret which had come so strangely into his possession, without affording any one a chance of insinuating that his actions were governed by base motives.

It must also be admitted that his sympathy for Ralph could not keep his heart from beating faster at the thought of the way thus left open for himself, though he would not allow himself to dwell upon it.

"Well!" he said, honestly "I am very much deceived, I thought your conquest was assured."

Ralph smiled, rather a bitter smile as he answered,—

"You see, one cannot always trust to appearances."

"I am sorry," continued Frank, "to add to your burden, but as it happens, I myself am the bearer of evil tidings."

Ralph glanced up listlessly.—

"It matters little; after this morning I care not much what may occur."

"But this is really serious, you must prepare yourself for a heavy blow; my information will effect a radical change in your whole life."

"Very good. I am listening, though I cannot realize that anything you may have to say will be of the slightest moment."

"It is something I have recently learned, concerning your cousin Richard."

Ralph was roused at last, and effectually; his cheeks flushed, his eyes blazed with passion, and he seemed on the point of breaking into an angry outburst. However, he managed to restrain himself, and said calmly,—

"Take no notice of my mood, Frank, I am hurt, and consequently irritable; go on, what have you to say about Richard? Nothing good, of that I can be sure."

"I do not know," responded the other musingly; "the evil perhaps predominates, still there is a trait of good feeling displayed, for which I should not have given him credit."

"Speak out, Frank, I am interested enough now: to contemplate a good action of cousin Richard's I think I should come back even from the grave."

"Do not applaud too hastily; in this instance you are a victim to his virtue."

As briefly as possible he related the story of his accidental meeting with Dick, and his subsequent visit to the old woman.

Then he sketched in outline the contents of the letters, when Ralph interrupted impatiently,—

"The name, Frank! what was the girl's name?"

"Marie Dynevor."

"And she is dead you say?"

"Yes, she is dead, has been dead for years; the brute's desertion killed her, but Dick is at my house."

"Poor little chap. I must see to him, Frank, I will take charge of him and bring him up as if he were my own child."

Frank hesitated; his task was a hard one, but every moment made it more difficult.

"My dear Ralph," he said presently, "you do not quite grasp my meaning. There is no question as to the boy's bringing up. Richard himself placed the matter out of your power."

The other's face wore a puzzled expression; it was apparent, that as yet he did not realise his position.

"I am in the dark," he said helplessly. "Tell me quickly what your words imply?"

"Can you not see, that given one condition, the boy would have a home of his own?"

"Do you mean that Richard married Marie Dynevor?" he cried with unusual excitement.

"Yes, that is the fact. I have all the proofs in my possession."

Ralph raised his head.

"Thank Heaven," he exclaimed, fervently, "the knowledge of that will at least soften her misery."

It was his companion's turn now to look astonished, for as yet he did not know that Adelaide Travers was Marie Dynevor's sister; neither did Ralph enlighten him just then.

"Of course this is a very serious business," exclaimed Ralph, after a brief silence, "it means that I must give up Oatleigh to the boy; still, I am glad Richard was not quite the brute we judged him to be. We will go and see Barclay and Simmonds—my lawyers—in the morning, and put the case in their hands. I shall go away, to Italy perhaps, and turn painter. You will see me in the Academy yet."

Frank pressed his hand.

"It is unfortunate for you," he said sadly, "but we cannot defraud the younger of his rights."

Soon after Frank took his leave, having promised to meet his friend in the morning at the lawyer's office.

Old Mr. Barclay shook his head ominously as he perused the papers which Frank submitted to him.

"It is quite plain, Mr. Somerset," he decided, "there is not the slightest flaw in the evidence, the boy is undoubtedly the rightful owner of Oatleigh."

"Very good," exclaimed Ralph, "if the proofs are correct, I shall not contest the case. I leave the whole affair in your hands."

The lawyer bowed.

"Are you remaining in London?" he asked.

"I think not; but I will send you my address, in case you should require me."

They went out from the office, and Ralph said,—

"Now let us go and see the little chap, and then I must begin to make my preparations."

"Yes," he said later on, when they were in Frank's room, and he had Dick perched on his knees, "there is no mistake about one thing. This is my cousin's son at all events, let us hope he will make a better man than his father."

He kissed the little fellow and put him down; then turning to Frank, he continued,—

"I shall run down to Oatleigh to-morrow, and leave for the Continent as soon as possible, so that we may not meet again for some time, but I will write to you before I go."

They shook hands in silence, and Ralph strode away hastily; he could not trust himself to speak further.

It was late before he had completed his arrangements; but he found time to pay a visit to the doctor's, where he ascertained that Adelaide was steadily improving and not likely to suffer a relapse.

That night after Dick had been put to bed Frank sat for hours thinking deeply upon the strange events of the last few days; but principally upon the ill success of his friend's wooing. Why had Adelaide sent him away?

He had certainly imagined that she was in love with him; but if not—and the blood coursed more furiously through his veins—why should there not be still a chance for himself?

One remarkable utterance, too, of Ralph's, occasioned him considerable perplexity.

What did he mean by his remark that Richard's marriage would mitigate her grief? Whose grief? There was some further mystery in connection with the affair which he did not understand.

Two or three days later the receipt of a letter from Ralph, aided considerably in lessening some of the complications.

"Dear Frank," he wrote, "you must pardon me for running away and leaving you in ignorance of one or two points connected with the strange discovery of my cousin's child."

"There is another person besides myself intimately concerned in the matter, and I have been debating whether I should communicate the startling news to her in person. Upon mature reflection I think it will be better to leave it in your hands. I refer to Miss Travers."

"I have reason to believe, in fact I know, that Miss Travers is the sister of the poor girl whom my cousin married, and consequently is Dick's aunt. Will you do this for me? Soften the story of her sister's death as much as possible;

but I need scarcely advise you. I am going to Rome, and will send you my new address in a week or two.

"Ever your friend,

"RALPH."

The perusal of this note afforded Frank a clearer light upon some points though it heightened the mystery in another direction. How had Ralph learned this secret, and how long had it been in his possession?

Did it supply the reason for her refusal of his offer? Altogether he was lost in conjecture and amazement.

Dick was still with him, and laying down the letter, Frank said,—

"Dick, my boy, should you like to go with me and see a beautiful lady?"

The child's eyes brightened.

"Yes," he replied, sturdily, "I like pretty ladies; but," doubtfully, "shall we come back?"

"Yes, we shall come back, if you like," Frank assented laughingly, and with a touch of gratified pride, for he had grown exceedingly fond of the child. He rang the bell, and committed his young charge to the care of the landlady.

"I am going to take him out, Mrs. Stokes," he remarked, "if you will get him ready;" and the worthy woman bustled him off, bringing him back shortly afterwards, looking as she expressed it, "like a little prince."

"Dick," said the young man, pleasantly, "I think Granny would be rather astonished if she could see you now."

A big tear rolled down Dick's cheeks, and he clutched Frank's hand tightly as if half afraid that he was to be handed over to Granny's tender mercies.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRANK had not seen Adelaide for some little time past, and he was shocked at the change in her appearance.

Her eyes were heavy and red as if with continual weeping, her cheeks were dreadfully pale, and there was a look of misery about her that made his heart ache.

She rose from the couch on which she had been lying when he entered the room and welcomed him heartily, afterwards turning with interest to the child, who clung sturdily to Frank's hand.

"You are almost a stranger," she said with a sweet smile, "I thought you had forgotten me."

Frank blushed in confusion. "I shall not easily forget you," he answered, "but lately I have been extremely busy over a rather romantic case."

She noticed his hesitation and came to the rescue.

"Yes," she said graciously, "and now you are come to tell me about it. Does it concern your little friend?" and she patted Dick's head with her soft hand. "He is a pretty child, what is his name?"

"I call him Dick," answered Frank slowly, "and it's about him I wish to speak to you."

Though many people considered her hard and cold, Adelaide was passionately fond of children, and now she took Dick on her lap and kissed him; and he looking into the sad, trustful eyes, was content to nestle his little head covered with its sunny, flaxen curls upon her bosom.

"You are the pretty lady," he announced with an air of decision; "I like you, you are different to Gran! Uncle Frank said you was a pretty lady."

Frank gave an embarrassed laugh, and Adelaide looking up, asked—

"Is he your nephew?"

"No! but he is the hero of the romance of which I wish to speak. It is rather a curious story, and concerns yourself very nearly."

An eager, searching look leapt into her eyes, a rush of colour suffused the wan cheeks, and she felt her heart beating violently.

The child concerned her! What did it mean? Why should she be so startled?

"Go on," she cried breathlessly, "tell me what it is."

Then suddenly a sickening sense of fear seized her, the colour faded from her face, and her heart almost ceased to beat.

Frank was greatly perplexed. He knew nothing of the real tragedy of Marie Dynevor's life, he only knew that she had married Richard Somerset and had died in poverty, leaving an heir to the Oatleigh estates.

"Do not distress yourself," he said kindly, "the story which I have to relate, if it has its sad side, has also a bright one, and however sorry we may be for Mr. Somerset, yet we ought to rejoice that this little fellow has received justice."

"Mr. Somerset?" she echoed vaguely, "what has he to do with your story?"

Frank smiled.

"A great deal," he replied quietly, "but I had better begin at the beginning."

Then he proceeded to tell her in simple language of his first meeting with Dick, and of his visit to the old woman who had charge of him.

Remembering Ralph's injunction he touched lightly upon the wretched state of the child's home, and accounted for his own subsequent conduct by the mutual attachment which had sprung up between him and Dick.

Adelaide did not interrupt him, but her eyes expressed more forcibly than words could have done, the respect and esteem with which his noble action inspired her.

Then he passed to the finding of the dead woman's letters, and Adelaide who could no longer restrain her impatience exclaimed excitedly,—

"Her name! tell me her name!"

He looked at her gravely.

"Her name," he said, "the name of Dick's mother was Marie Dynevor."

From the very first she had half suspected the truth, but it came as a shock nevertheless, and her wan face grew more ghastly still.

"Then," she said, hoarsely, "this is my nephew, for I am Marie Dynevor's sister."

He bowed his head in assent, he did not guess what a fearful agony of shame the beautiful woman was suffering; but he was surprised she did not allude to Ralph.

Presently he said—

"Now you will understand how greatly this discovery affects Mr. Somerset."

She looked at him wildly.

"No," she answered, "I cannot tell what it has to do with Mr. Ralph Somerset."

"But surely you are aware he succeeded to the Oatleigh estates as the next heir, a position, which, as it turns out, he did not hold. Directly he heard of his cousin Richard's child, of course he gave up possession, and Master Dick there, who by the way seems to have taken to you wonderfully, is the present owner of Oatleigh Grange."

Adelaide could scarcely keep her senses. What was the man saying? Dick his father's heir! She did not know much of legal matters, but she was aware that if Dick could inherit his father's property, her sister must have been lawfully married, and once more her eyes were filled with tears, but now they were tears of joy.

Still she must not be too confident. Perhaps they had made a mistake, had taken things too much for granted; she must set her doubts at rest at once.

"Forgive my question," she said pleadingly, "but are you quite sure of all this? May there not be some flaw somewhere?"

"Not one," he broke in eagerly; "we have taken the papers to Ralph's lawyer, and he says the case is complete, nothing is wanting."

"But the marriage,—have you the proof of that?"

"I examined the register myself."

"Heaven bless you," she cried, and the hot tears rolled down her cheeks.

Dick lifted his pretty face in wonder.

"Don't cry, pretty lady," he said, "I will kiss you," and he pressed his rosy mouth to her lips.

"Oh, Dick," she sobbed, "I am so happy, and you will stay with me, Dick, my pretty one will you not? and I will love you, oh, so well. Will you stay with me and be my little boy?"

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CHAPTER XVI.

In a few hurried, pregnant sentences, Lord St. Austell related to Georgie Walmer all that had happened at Courtgardens in the afternoon of that day.

He acknowledged that he had acted villainously in the affair—acknowledged it boldly and frankly—but he would not own that he was penitent—neither was he.

It was Hildegard herself, and not he, he maintained doggedly, who had done the greater wrong.

Everything was soon told—the two standing together there in the pale light from the candle-labra, the minutes, the precious minutes, speeding on.

Yet Georgie Walmer at first almost refused to believe that all was over and ended between Ughtred and Hildegard Ray; and that Hildegard had, moreover, discovered, in some extraordinary, unguessed-of way or other, that she, Georgie herself, was, after all, the woman whom Ughtred really and truly loved!

But Lord St. Austell speedily convinced her, and Georgie doubted no longer.

Listening to him, her first emotion was one of deep and intense happiness; but in the next moment all hope and trust died as swiftly as they had sprung into life.

Knowing Ughtred St. Austell so well, she knew and understood even now—yes, even though circumstances were so vastly and so suddenly changed—that they two could never, never be more or nearer to each other than they had been all along from the beginning.

Their lives in this sad world were as parallel lines—they could never come together and continue as one.

She burst into tears.

"And now you are leaving us!" she said brokenly.

"Yes, little one. To me, Drummerfield is the most hateful spot on earth."

The girl shivered, and dried her eyes slowly.

"I cannot yet realise it—I cannot yet think of it as all being true, Ughtred!" she whispered. "It seems all so strange—so—so wholly impossible. And your going away like this will just break the mother's heart. I cannot help thinking of her."

"I also have been thinking of her," returned Lord St. Austell, moodily, though his features softened as he spoke. "I cannot see her before I go, Georgie. I could not stand her tears and her entreaties; I couldn't darling—and they would be inevitable, you know. In a quarter of an hour, I shall have left the old house, and you must tell her everything after I am gone. No one could break it to her, Georgie, so tenderly as you."

Selfish and hard even to the very last, and consumed with fierce impatience to get away immediately from the neighbourhood of the scene of his late humiliation, he never paused to think of what Georgie herself would be called upon to endure, when the news of his flight should be broken to the suffering mother who held him in her heart so dear.

"She is asleep, now," the young girl said, earnestly—"sleeping peacefully and soundly. It would be downright sinful of you, Ughtred, to go away without seeing her. Come with me, dear—come and kiss her as she sleeps. She will not wake. When—when you are gone, and her first grief is over, it will make her happy to think that you were near her at the last—though she did not see you—just before you went away. We do not know when we shall see you again; we—we do not even know where you are going to-night," said Georgie, forlornly.

And once more her sweet low voice trembled, though she tried her bravest to keep it steady.

"The mail will quickly land me in London, I hope," he answered. "I shall look up a friend in town who will be glad to see me, and upon whom I can rely in all things, and probably we shall go abroad together directly. But, of course, Georgie, you shall hear of my whereabouts later on."

She sighed hopelessly.

"Come and see the mother," she said simply.

So they went upstairs together, he holding Georgie's cold little hand closely to his breast, as they traversed the long dim passages and mouldy tapestry-hung corridors.

To cross her, to show her that he really loved her, after his own characteristically selfish fashion, was no treason to Hildegard now; and so Georgie Walmer reproached him no longer, as she had reproached him, because it was her duty, scores of times before—when his every word and look had been treachery to Hildegard Ray.

They came to the rooms of Lady St. Austell, and Georgie entered the bedchamber first.

The night-lamp was turned down low; the large apartment seemed full of phantoms.

The mother had fallen asleep when Georgie was reading to her after tea, never dreaming that, in this deep slumber into which she had dropped so readily and so restfully, she would part for evermore, in this life at least, from him who was all the world to her in it.

Georgie, in silence, at the bedside, beckoned to Ughtred standing moodily there on the threshold.

He stepped up softly to the bed then, and looked troubledly down on the worn face of his mother.

In spite of his manhood, and his abundant experience of the world and worldly ways, his eyes filled suddenly with tears as he gazed down on the unconscious woman who had given him life—the mother whose love and adoration he had repaid always with such scant show of affection—lying there now before him so helpless and so still as though suffering for her was already over and done with, and kind death had claimed her for his own.

He marked how wan and ill she looked—he noted well how silver-white was her hair. That poor worn lined face amid the pillows, all unconcerned of his nearness and his presence, haunted his memory until his dying day.

"Will you not kiss her?" breathed Georgie. He leaned carefully over the bed and just touched with his own the lips of his mother.

She did not wake—she did not stir—she only smiled faintly in her sleep as if she knew that he was near.

It was their last farewell on earth. When mother and son met each other again they greeted in the Silent Land.

With an overburdened heart Lord St. Austell quitted the room, and Georgie, with falling tear-drops, softly followed him.

Hand locked in hand they went down as they had come up, and neither of them spoke a word until they reached the hall.

It was five minutes to eight. Five minutes more and the dog-cart was due.

"Oh, Ughtred!" Georgie ventured, "will you not trust me—confide in me, Ughtred?"

"How so, little one?"

"Will you not tell me what you intend to do—where you intend to go eventually? What, I mean, Ughtred, is your life to be henceforward?"

"I do not know myself, dear," he answered; and it was the truth.

Poor little Georgie sighed again—a long-drawn quivering sigh.

"How hard it all is!" she cried—"and oh, Ughtred, only to think that at Christmas you and Hildegard—"

"Be quiet, Georgie," he stopped her roughly. "Don't mention her name to me. I hate the sound of it. She and her accursed money are phantoms and horrors of the past. Let me forget them if I can!"

And again the young girl shivered involuntarily. She was thinking how desolate and heart-broken must be the betrayed and stricken woman at Courtgardens! She longed with all her gentle soul to go and comfort Hildegard Ray.

Ughtred St. Austell—with Georgie watching pathetically his every movement—buttoned up his travelling-coat; and putting on his hat, he opened the great nail-studded door, and went out into the darkness of the night.

Georgie crept timidly after him. The dog-cart had not yet come round to the front.

The night was very still; the sky was veiled in the murky November mists, but a sickly gibbous

moon, now and then, gleamed wanly through them.

An owl in the distance flew over the moat to roost in the battered sheds, its harsh screech breaking for the moment the oppressive calm of the air.

It was almost such another night—only warmer—as the night of Hildegard's bail; under cover of which, when the dawn was near, Richard Falkland had turned his back on Courtgardens.

And, similarly as Dick had gone some two days ago, Ughtred St. Austell, the favoured lover then, was going now!

"Georgie, are you here?"

"Yes, I am here."

She was at his side in an instant, and he clasped his strong arms around her lithe form.

"Always remember, Georgie, that I loved you very dearly," he said huskily—"better and more dearly than any woman living. Dear little love, if I never return to the Moat House, always remember that!"

"But you will return to it—you must!" she cried with unutterable pathos; "for—for the mother's sake; and—for the sake of me, Ughtred."

"We will see," he answered tenderly. "But you will always remember, my darling!"

"Oh, how could I ever forget!" she sobbed.

The gaunt old elms around them stirred and creaked weirdly in the darkness; the vapour was beginning to fall like fine rain.

"And now before I go," went on Lord St. Austell, gently, still straining her closely to his heart—and Hildegard herself had never once heard those gentle wooing tones—"before I go, Georgie, let me hear you say that you love me! I want to hear you say that before I leave you; because in all your life, you know, you have never once really said it. Come, my darling."

And so she, with her head on his breast, looked up with tear-laden, weary eyes into his dark face, and said,—

"I do love you, Ughtred—have not I always loved you?"

He held her to his breast as though he could never part with her, never give her up—and yet what little solace was there in telling him at last that which he had assuredly known for so long—that which, though now confessed, could bring them no nearer to each other!

"You will always take care of the mother, Georgie—for my sake?"

"Always, always."

"And now good-bye, dear love," he said then; "the time is up."

"Ah, must you indeed leave me—I cannot bear it!" she cried, clinging to him with all her strength. "Must you indeed leave me here alone, Ughtred? Is there, then, no alternative? Heaven only knows how dreary my life will be without you now!"

"The horse is coming," he said hurriedly. "Can you not hear the wheels, Georgie? Darling, dear heart, kiss me for the last time. Good-bye—good-bye—good-bye!"

She kissed him again and again, her lips glued on his, and all her despairing young soul was in that farewell caress.

Though he was deaf to the yearning of her melancholy cry, she knew that he loved her right well in his own way; and there was comfort—barren as it was—in the mere thought.

So she let him go!

As the horse and dogcart loomed large within sight through the gently-falling mist, she slipped from St. Austell's arms and shrank away into the deep shadow of the great projecting doorway.

She saw the luggage brought out, and heard the old servants muttering and lingering in the hall.

She saw St. Austell climb up into the tall cart, with the misty yellow light from the lamps by the wheels flickering over his bearded face.

And then she saw the man spring up to his seat behind, and the master gathering up the reins.

In another moment he was gone—gone from her sight—and only the empty moist darkness remained there before her.

She waited until the sound of the swift wheels was lost in the distance, and then, shivering from

head to foot, she crept back into the house, and locked the ponderous door; though not before she had lifted her streaming, agonized eyes to the murky heavens outside, with a voiceless prayer on her lips for the safety of Ughtred St. Austell.

But the loving, heart-broken prayer, all pathetically sincere as it was, was nevertheless in vain—all in vain.

He never came back to Georgie and the Moat House. The desolate old home had seen him for the last time!

CHAPTER XVII.

MORE news and excitement for Drummerfield! Wonders would never cease, folk said!

Richard Falkland was forgotten in this new stir which had followed so quickly on the young surgeon's disappearance.

People could not, in fact, would not believe, so they declared, that this new rumour was correct—and the wedding and all so near too!

It was not likely—it was not possible!

"Why, you be daft, surely," said Nancy Brown, scornfully, to a neighbour, who, with her last baby in her arms, and her last but one clinging to her skirts, had just run in to bring old Nancy the news.

"Get along wid ye, 'cause I don't believe a word on't."

"Then you must do the 't'other thing, Mrs. Brown, I 'spose," returned the neighbour resignedly—"as the saying is. All I knows is as fax is fax, and they speak for 'emselves. One of the scullery-maids, which her name is Maria, told my 'Lisbeth all about it when she went up to the great house this mornin'. Didn't she, Nelly; you was with 'Lisbeth, you know, Nelly, ducky!"—looking down at the small, thinly-clad mortal that was clinging to its mother's gown, nearly hidden altogether in the limp print folds.

"Ees," responded Nelly, shyly.

"And what for did that gal 'Lisbeth of yours go up to the great house?" demanded old Nancy Brown, jealously—"Milk! Scrape and that from Miss Beller?"

"May be," answered the neighbour, shortly, hurt at the sceptical spirit in which her friendly information had been received. "I wish you good-morning, ma'am."

Just as Drummerfield had gossiped and wagged its head over poor Richard a few days previously, so was it now gossiping and wagging its head over Lord St. Austell and Hildegard Ray—over the engagement which had terminated and been broken off, so extraordinarily and unexpectedly, with the actual wedding-day close at hand.

There were some who blamed Hildegard and commiserated her lover; whilst others took upon themselves to report that Lord St. Austell was in the wrong, and consequently bespoke pity for Hildegard.

Anyhow, the affair was unparalleled for pure domestic interest in the short and simple annals of Drummerfield, and as such merited to be discussed for the nine days' space allotted to a "wonder."

Had they quarrelled, or what?

And exactly as the inhabitants of Drummerfield had set themselves valiantly to work to ferret out the motive of Richard Falkland's peculiar conduct, so now did they bestir themselves again in the hope of getting to the bottom of this mysterious business of the severed pair.

Drummerfield hated to be puzzled; worse still,—beaten!

The engagement was broken off for good; there was no gainsaying that. But whether a quarrel was in any wise mixed up with the matter, or whether a quarrel had nothing whatever to do with it, the gossips of the neighbourhood of Drummerfield would settle amongst themselves in time.

In Mrs. Hobson's spic-and-span drawing-room there was quite an assemblage of friends, in the midst of whom, like an oracle, that afternoon, sat the lady of the house herself.

They had all come trooping in, in their zeal and eagerness to glean aught that the doctor's wife might have to impart upon a subject which

indeed, at the present moment, was one of the deepest import to the whole community—as the ladies themselves primly expressed it.

Dear Mrs. Hobson could of course tell them something interesting, said they sweetly, since Mrs. Hobson's husband had been summoned in haste to attend Miss Ray at Courtgardens.

Yes—that was perfectly true. Dr. Hobson had been called to Courtgardens late in the afternoon of the day before yesterday, in fact; but it was not until that very morning that he had divined the true cause of Miss Ray's indisposition—he having been kept entirely in the dark up at the house itself, which to him, as their medical man, was hardly fair—for, naturally it was not an over difficult matter to put two and two together and make four, after hearing indirectly from an outsider that the marriage was "off," and that Lord St. Austell, himself, had once again left Drummerfield, and had gone away, nobody could tell whither!

"Yes, of course, it was easy enough to guess then," assented the vicar's wife mildly.

"But what I should like to know is, why was the match broken off? The why and the wherefore of this very singular proceeding? That, I think, is the question which everyone is asking of his neighbour—the question, it seems, that no one can answer satisfactorily."

Mrs. Hobson looked vexed. Her ruddy face was puckered into a frown.

"Nonsense," she said determinedly. "It will leak out in time, depend upon it!"

"I do so love a mystery!" exclaimed a maiden of forty—"do not you, Miss Grampus?"

Miss Grampus was the attorney's only daughter, her youth likewise being a thing of the past, though she owned modestly to twenty-seven. Miss Grampus was of a sentimental turn, and could write poetry by the light of the moon—lovely poems a yard in length, her enemies said sometimes unkindly.

"Ah yes, indeed!" Miss Grampus sighed now, factually, "especially if it be a mystery connected with the affections of the heart!"

"But I must not forget to tell you all," Mrs. Hobson hurried on importantly, "something which I myself, individually, consider most remarkable and indeed unaccountable. We all thought—did we not—that young Falkland's behaviour was, to say the very least, inexplicable; but I really think that this other affair is more astonishing in every way. Well, as I have already said, the doctor was summoned post-haste to see Miss Ray late in the afternoon. When he came home, he told me that he had found her in an unconscious state, and that he never saw anyone so completely changed in all his life before. We"—with emphasis—"we, you know, saw her at the ball, when indeed she looked radiantly beautiful; and Dr. Hobson declared that, on seeing her again the other afternoon, he positively hardly recognised her for the same person. She was in a dead faint or something, you must understand."

"Yes, yes—but in what way was she altered?" inquired the vicar's wife breathlessly. "I, too, saw her at the ball, remember."

"Of course. Well, she was and is still, I believe, so dreadfully lined-looking and haggard about the eyes and mouth. All her beauty seems gone, in fact, the doctor says, and she looks ten years older, at least. However, I hear from him that she is getting better and stronger every day; and I should not wonder myself if—"

"But what had caused her to swoon?" interrupted Miss Grampus, deeply moved. "Was it the last harrowing interview with the beloved one? Poor thing, poor thing! People, you know, are saying something of the sort, dear Mrs. Hobson—they are indeed."

"There is reason to believe, I must admit, that you are not far wrong, Miss Grampus," returned Mrs. Hobson oracularly, "although everything is kept so quiet at present. But, there, bless me, I am positively forgetting the most important piece of news of all—the something which, as I told you just now, seems to me most remarkable and unaccountable. Well, as I was saying, the very first thing that Dr. Hobson noticed, on entering the library at Courtgardens in which Miss Ray lay unconscious, was a deep

red wound across her temple near her hair, and bleeding even then—"

"A deep red wound! . . . and bleeding even then! . . . Oh, Mrs. Hobson!" exclaimed everyone in a breath.

And so on, unceasingly, throughout the afternoon—gabble, gabble, gabble, cackle, cackle, cackle—until the early winter darkness closed in around them, and their faces looked old and gray in the deepening gloom.

And yet once more, for the third occasion, was Drummerfield agitated and shaken to the core.

Courtgardens, now, was deserted and its mistresses flown!

Hildegard and Miss Arabella, with a maid between them, after the recent troubles and perplexities at home, had migrated, for change of air and scene, to an unknown, quiet little seaside hamlet on the south Cornish coast, called Penarthur's Bay.

Quiet and rest had been prescribed by Dr. Hobson himself; and then he had suddenly remembered Penarthur, and strongly recommended the place.

And so anxious Aunt Bella, meeting with no opposition whatever, had straightway carried off her listless patient, the moment she was strong enough to travel.

CHAPTER XVIII.

At the Moat House, in wordless grief, Lady St. Austell, watched over and tended unweariedly by Georgie Walmer, was lying near to the door of death—thinking, ever thinking of her beloved absent son.

"I want to see him before I die," was the burden of her daily prayer; "I must see him before I die, Georgie. Unless I see my dear son once again I cannot die in peace."

But the winter passed with its endless gray days, and Drummerfield, once more, was in the soft green glory of an early warm spring.

The meadows were bright and fresh; the pasture lands, where the cattle lay, and through which the stream ran glancing and glinting beneath the fitful April sunlight, looked even yet brighter and freer after an occasional breezy shower.

High up in the heavens, a tiny brown speck against a sea of blue, the lark was singing and trilling as though indeed the summer had already come; and in the wilderness of a garden, at the old Moat House, the blackbirds and thrushes, secure in the green depths of the unfrequented shrubberies, were rearing, glad and fearless, their callow broods.

Gazing out of her window, from her raised cushions and pillows, upon the loveliness of budding nature—the emerald tree-tops and the billowy fields—Lady St. Austell knew perfectly well that this was the last earthly springtide she would ever behold.

The winter was in truth gone at last, the gusty bitter winter, and with it had died in a measure the first great sorrow which had followed so overwhelmingly on her son's cruel desertion.

But Georgie Walmer, so long as she lived, would never forget that dreadful night, when the truth, somehow, had to be broken to the mother—the truth, so terrible and so difficult to impart, which Ughtred St. Austell, in his utter selfishness, had left for the girl to tell alone.

A melancholy, awful night—and Georgie would ever remember it!

The knowledge of his dishonour, for the loving mother, was naturally bitter and hard enough to bear; but the thought of that silent, stealthy leave-taking of his was somehow infinitely worse.

It was not so much the loss of Hildegard's fortune which was breaking so slowly but surely the tired heart—but the passionate and unsatisfied yearning, the weary, weary waiting and watching for the return of the prodigal son who had forsaken her without a word.

Although he had written occasionally to tell them where he was sojourning, nothing was ever said, in those brief and hurriedly-scribbled letters, about his coming back again to Drummerfield.

He was still abroad and miles away, in the company of that wild bachelor friend, a certain Captain Langton, to whom he had gone straight-

way for sympathy and oblivion on the night he left the Moat House.

And although the lonely mother, by the aid of Georgie's pen, had prayed him to return to her before it should be too late, these piteous loving prayers, so far, had remained unanswered.

He never came.

"It is my own fault, all my own fault!" Lady St. Austell would cry sometimes, "and now I am punished for it. It was I who hankered after and coveted night and day the fortune of that woman at Courtgardens; and yes, this now is my punishment," she moaned monotonously. "I thought it would be for his good; I thought it would make him happy; with all my love and mother-worship I could not give him Hildegard's money, and I told him that he must win it for himself. From beginning to end it has all been a mistake, and now I am punished for it indeed! Oh, Georgie, Georgie, I must see my boy again, or I cannot die in peace!"

All the winter months through had she lain at death's door, there, as it were, within the shadow of the shadow—the wind sweeping and shrieking round the Moat House, with its jarring, rattling casements and ghostly-creaking floors, as though determined to proclaim, in its own blustering fashion, that there was no luck left for the desolate old mansion; still the dark portal had not been entered actually, and Lady St. Austell had lingered until the spring dawn of another year.

But worthy Dr. Hobson, who of late had been a constant visitor at the Moat House, had confessed confidentially to his higher-class patients in Drummerfield, that the end was approaching, approaching fast.

Nor was it to be wondered at, he added, in tones of professional regret, since her ladyship had been so weak for many years past, since in her weakness she had endured so much. Ah, no—it was no wonder, as Dr. Hobson said.

The April afternoon was beautifully warm; the high blue sky as beautifully clear.

There were no light, fleecy, fleckle clouds trailing in fragments athwart the heavens today; no quick silver slanting showers drifting up from the west.

The soaring liquid-throated larks seemed more joyous than ever, as they trilled their sweet peans heavenward so far from the green earth below.

Dr. Hobson had just paid his daily visit to the bed-chamber of Lady St. Austell, and had now driven away.

He had left her sinking into a quiet and refreshing slumber, with Georgie Walmer sitting patiently as usual by the faded silken curtain of the bed.

Listening to the noisy chirping of the parent-birds in the elms, and the low, fitful rustling of the tender young leaves—whispering amongst themselves, perchance, of the coming summer-time—which found their way in at the wide, old-fashioned lattice opposite to the bed-foot, open this balmy afternoon with Dr. Hobson's consent, and hearing then the slow, irregular breathing on the other side of the curtain, Georgie's heart was very full.

Yes, the glad summer, in all its lush beauty, would soon be there indeed, but the only real friend she possessed in the world would no longer be with her to gaze upon its loveliness.

She could discern, as plainly as could Dr. Hobson himself, that the dear adopted mother was fading day by day; and so what wonder if the salt tears fell fast from the girl's and eyes that bright afternoon, as she said to herself that which she had thought of often lately—

"What will become of me if I live to grow old?"

But there lingered in her heart one fond, dear hope that caused it to rejoice exceedingly sometimes—a hope too vague and sweet to express in plain words. She could only breathe it to herself, as it were, and to herself alone.

"He may come back to me," was the precious thought—"he may return, at last, one day, to claim my love!" Then—"who can tell!" she murmured aloud.

And so every day, like his mother, she watched and waited for his coming; and every day, like his mother, she watched and waited in vain!



"A DEEP RED WOUND! . . . AND BLEEDING! . . . OH, MRS. HOBSON!" EXCLAIMED EVERYONE.

He did not come.

And then she would chide her heart for its foolish expectancy; for did she not well know, in her secret, inmost soul, the callous, selfish nature of the man she loved?

Lady St. Austell awoke presently, and Georgie heard her shiver. In a moment the curtains were swept noiselessly aside, and the girl was leaning over the pillows.

"Shall I close the window, dear mother?" she inquired anxiously. "Do you find it growing chilly?"

"A little, I fancy, Georgie," Lady St. Austell answered wearily. "It certainly looks warm enough out-of-doors, but I expect that it is not really so. The spring in England is so treacherous and deceptive always—one cannot be too careful. Yes, darling, shut the window, please, and then come back to me."

So the ponderous old lattice was drawn carefully to, and the warm, sweet, balmy air excluded from the room, together with the cheery voices of the birds and the music of the whispering leaves.

"And now what shall I read to you, dear mother?" Georgie asked, the old patient question ever ready on her lips. "We have nothing on hand just now, have we? We finished *Christabel* last night, you know."

"Ah, dear, no books!" sighed Lady St. Austell—"let us talk awhile. Sit you down, Georgie, in your old place. I like to have you, dear, quite near to me."

So Georgie, well divining what she was about to hear, seated herself once more by the faded curtain, and began to caress, as she frequently did, one of those thin, white, jewelled hands that lay upon the coverlet.

It was scarcely the hand of a living woman, she thought pitifully, it was so cold and thin. The costly rings were far too large for it now!

"And you are sure, Georgie, quite sure, that there was no letter in the bag this morning?" began Lady St. Austell. "I cannot understand it, dear, he has not written now for several weeks

past. It seems to me so very strange. Does not it to you, Georgie? And do you know, last night, I somehow felt so confident that I should hear from him to-day—I did, Georgie, and I wonder why? Yes, I felt certain, in some way or other, that we should hear from him to-day. Dearie, it is so hard to be disappointed again!"

The weak voice ended in a sob. The tears, one by one, slipped down the wasted cheeks, Georgie pressed and fondled the thin white hand more closely.

"Yes, it is hard," she said, with ineffable tenderness; "but indeed, dearest mother, there was no letter in the bag. Trust me, I should not have missed it!"

"Well, Georgie, I cannot understand it," Lady St. Austell said again thoughtfully. "My conviction of last night, do you know, amounted almost to a presentiment—I felt so certain of hearing from him to-day. And oh, Georgie, I was actually foolish enough to dream that perhaps he might come himself! And I said in my heart, as I lay awake,—

"He has not written for so long, and so he will surely come." But the day is passing, Georgie, and—and nothing has happened."

Just for one brief mad moment the heart of the girl throbbed hopefully.

The emotion perished swiftly, however, and left her once more patient and sad.

"There may be a letter to-morrow," she said, trying to speak as if she believed it. "Let us wait patiently, dear mother, and see what the morrow may have in store for us."

"I am weary of waiting—I am sick unto death of hoping," exclaimed Lady St. Austell, passionately; "and I have lost all faith in to-morrow! Oh, Georgie," the weak voice faltering and breaking—"tell me what he said when he last wrote. Let us go over it together again, shall we?—My memory has failed me singularly of late, and I cannot now remember what it was he told us. Perhaps it will comfort me to listen to it again. It is more than five weeks since we received his

last. Five weeks ago! What a century it seems!"

"I will fetch his last letter," said Georgie, about to rise.

"No, darling, do not leave me," cried Lady St. Austell, with almost childish caprice—"I cannot bear you out of my sight. Besides, you can remember what he wrote—can you not, dear!—without going for the letter? Did he not tell us something special? Think for a moment, darling. I have an indistinct recollection, myself, of something particular and out of the common course of news. What could it be?"

There was no occasion for Georgie to think about the matter. She knew by heart those letters of the exile.

"He wrote to us from Lisbon, if you remember," she said softly, "on the evening before he started for Madeira; and he mentioned the boat he was going in—the *Donna Anna*. You recollect now, mother? Captain Langton, who owns large plantations in the island, was wanted urgently over there by his agent, and was obliged to go. He asked Ughtred to accompany him thither, as he wanted company on the journey—and Ughtred agreed. They purposed starting on the following day, and would be gone altogether, Ughtred fancied, for about three weeks or a month. And he said, too, if you remember, that they should probably return in the same boat they were starting in—the mail packet *Donna Anna*. They ought to have returned, or to be returning by this time, mother darling, ought they not? At the most, they might be five weeks absent from the Continent—not a day longer, because they were then due in Paris. Ughtred himself said so in the letter."

"Ah, yes!" said Lady St. Austell dreamily, remembering the contents of that last epistle perfectly now—"Thank you, Georgie. All this then, of course, accounts for his silence. It was foolish of me, dearie, to worry about it. At the moment I could not recall that Ughtred had gone to Madeira!"

(To be continued.)



"HAVE YOU LOST YOUR WAY?" ASKED BARBARA FELLOWES, KINDLY.

UNDER A CLOUD.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Rev. Noel Armitage was an excellent clergyman, and extremely popular among his parishioners, but these latter would have been truly thankful had he come among them unaccompanied by his sister, for Miss Penelope was one of those women who, with the best intentions and the highest principles, are yet a perpetual blister to their friends and neighbours.

The Vicar was young, barely thirty, a quiet, thoughtful man, with a pleasant smile and a ready kindness; he believed rather too implicitly in his fellow creatures, which was somewhat strange, since he had been brought up by his sister who had no faith in anyone.

High Cliff and three hundred a year meant almost wealth after an ill-paid curacy in one of the Yorkshire manufacturing towns.

Mr. Armitage was perfectly happy, and his sister would have been so too, could she only have got rid of the dread, so plainly detected by Percy Fellowes, that every marriageable lady in the neighbourhood was hoping to oust her from her post as the Vicar's housekeeper.

They sat at tea this bitter snowy February evening, when Olive Durant was tasting the severity of an English winter. Meat tea was a meal dear to Miss Penelope's heart, it was so economical!

She was a tall, angular woman, hard on fifty, with very thin faded brown hair, a pasty-coloured complexion, and eyes that could pierce an offender through and through. If only there had been some colour about Miss Penelope she would have been infinitely better looking; if she had even worn cheery dresses and tasty caps it would have been something; but she always arrayed herself in black gowns of a severe cut, and she objected to caps as a needless extravagance.

"It's an awful night, Pen," observed the Vicar

as he passed his cup to be replenished; "the snow will be ever so deep before morning."

"How fortunate you have not got to go out," said the thoughtful sister. "I had a note from Lady Fellowes to-day, Noel, asking us to dinner next week; she fixed on Wednesday, providing it was a fine evening."

"I hope you accepted it, Pen; there's not a pleasanter house in the neighbourhood than the Towers."

"I—I waited," said Pen, with some hesitation. "Of course they are very nice people; but I do think Miss Fellowes runs after you too much."

Mr. Armitage burst out laughing, he really could not help it. The only daughter of the Towers, a beautiful, sad-faced woman of twenty-five, was so utterly unlikely to "run after" any man.

You had only to look at Barbara's face to feel that for some reason known only to herself all thoughts of love and marriage had been renounced by her for ever.

"Penelope," said Mr. Armitage, growing very grave, as though to atone for that involuntary laugh; "you annoy me terribly by this fancy you have taken up that I am a good match, and everyone thinks so. It is prejudiced and unwomanly, and may bring us both into contempt and ridicule if others detect it. I know the world better than you do, and I assure you there is not one of our neighbours who would consent to let his daughter begin life on three hundred a year. I have not the least intention of marrying, I never yet saw the woman I could love, and so really, Penelope, I think you might give up your unworthy suspicions."

A servant came in with a note before Miss Penelope could answer him. It proved to be a summons to visit a dying man. Noel put on his great coat and sallied forth; he left his comfortable fireside without a murmur, and his sister looked after him with loving admiration.

"It's very well for him to say they don't run after him, but they do," was her reflection. "Well, he will be safe to-night; the most inde-

fatigable young ladies aren't likely to be visiting the poor, after dark on a snowy winter evening."

Suddenly, just five minutes after the Vicar's departure, the front-door bell rang, its loud peal echoing through the house. It was an unwonted sound. The Armitages gave no dinner parties, they had no neighbours near enough to drop in for an evening call; all people on parish business went to the back door; it was positively the first time since she came to High Cliff that Miss Penelope had heard that bell after dark.

The house was so intensely quiet that the sound seemed to echo through it again and again. The neat parlour maid, as much surprised as her mistress, hastened to answer the summons, and Miss Penelope—will it be believed—was curious enough to open the dining-room door a few inches and listen there with all her might.

It was a woman's voice, low, refined, evidently a lady's, that asked quietly—

"Can I see the Vicar?"

"He's just gone out, Miss," said the girl, civilly.

"Is Mrs. Melville at home?" pursued poor Olive, beginning to feel more utterly forlorn than before.

The maid was a native of High Cliff, she had known and loved the Melvilles and she was touched by this question.

"Will you come in and see Miss Armitage?" she asked. "Mrs. Melville is dead, but—"

"Dead!" the word came from the stranger's lips with something like a moan, and Miss Penelope, who had heard everything, left the dining-room and advanced to the intruder.

"Come in to the fire," she said, not unkindly, for as she reflected Noel would not be back under two hours, this trifling hospitality could not endanger his peace of mind. "I am sure you must be frozen. I will give you all the information I can."

Olive obeyed her meekly. Miss Penelope who was not a bad woman though a trying one, placed the stranger in the vicar's own armchair,

and made her swallow a cup of hot tea before she spoke again.

"If Mrs. Melville is dead," began Olive tremblingly, "perhaps my uncle will not be able to receive me. I am her niece, you know; father wrote to say I was coming."

"Sure enough a foreign letter *did* come for Mr. Melville this morning," admitted Miss Penelope; "we sent it on to the executors at once."

"The executors?"

"My poor child," said the old maid, "truth is best. Mr. and Mrs. Melville both died within a week of each other, they left next to nothing behind them; two of the children are in orphan asylums, the family charitably provided for the others. If you are Mrs. Melville's niece I can't understand how you didn't hear of it."

"We have lived in Africa all my life," said Olive. "Father wanted me to come to England and did not like my going to a boarding-house alone; he thought the Melvilles would perhaps give me a home and let him pay for it."

She added the last words because she did not want Miss Penelope to think her in need of charity; but she had mistaken the old maid's character.

If Olive had said she was poor and could not afford to pay for a night's lodging, Penelope Armitage would have given it her freely; but if she had money what was the use of exposing Noel to the dangers of meeting this lovely girl?

Had not Africa been his daydream for years? But for being offered the living of High Cliff would he not ere now have become a missionary in that deadly continent?

In Miss Penelope's mind the girl was doubly dangerous, first from her great beauty, next from her coming from the very place in which the young man was so greatly interested.

"Have you no friends in England?" demanded Miss Armitage; "or stay, if you are Mrs. Melville's niece you must be related to the Wyndhams, I can give you their address; they are most admirable people, and—"

"I do not want their address," said the girl coldly, interrupting Miss Penelope. "I do not desire to know them."

Miss Penelope froze at once; this young person must be an improper character, or she would not speak so strangely. Perhaps she was an impostor and not related to the Melvilles at all; yes, that must be it, and of course that was why she did not wish to meet Mrs. Wyndham, who of course she knew would expose her fraud.

"Then I am afraid I cannot help you," said the old maid stiffly, and Olive rose feeling that this was a hint to go.

Within was warmth and comfort, without the winter wind howled furiously, and the snow was coming down in thick white clouds, while every moment it seemed to grow colder; but Olive Durant did not hesitate.

A child of the sunny south she felt the cold as no English reared girl could have done, but she preferred to face the fury of the elements rather than appeal to Miss Armitage for a night's shelter.

But when she stood in the little hall, and the young servant summoned by Miss Penelope's bell opened the door for her, a terrible sense of loneliness seized on Olive.

England was all so strange and new, she felt almost frightened, and she said to the housemaid in a trembling voice,—

"Is there any hotel here where I could sleep to-night?"

Poor Olive! Reared in South Africa where every resort boasts an hotel of some description, which, indeed, is often the only building for miles, she little understood how unknown such conveniences are in a remote English village, but Jane fitted the young lady intensely, she was taken with the sweet face, and anxious to be of use to her, answered promptly,—

"There's no hotel within five miles, miss; but Mrs. Nelson takes in lodgers in summer time, and I don't doubt she'd make you comfortable for to-night. There's no more trains out of High Cliff, so I don't see what else you can do."

"Will you give me her address?" asked Olive, feeling a little less forlorn.

It was rather a complicated explanation that followed, especially for a girl who was a stranger to the place, but Miss Durant understood that if she turned twice to the left and once to the right she would come out at Mrs. Nelson's door, and that it couldn't take her more than ten minutes.

Unfortunately Jane forgot to say she must cross the road on leaving the vicarage; so, though poor Olive faithfully obeyed the other instructions, she never reached Mrs. Nelson's, but wandered on and on; she hardly knew where, save that she saw not a single human habitation, and found not a single lamp to guide her, but the cold wintry moon was up now and shone brightly on the white landscape.

"I can never go on," thought the poor child. "I am so tired. My hands are so stiff I can hardly move. Oh, if only I was at home."

A strange sleepiness was creeping over her. A strong temptation seized her to sit down by the hedge, and thus getting a little shelter from the snow, forget in slumber the misery of her position; and then suddenly she discovered a tall figure coming swiftly towards her, and heard a woman's voice ask kindly,—

"Have you lost your way?"

The relief after the long tension on her nerves was almost too great. Olive could not answer. She only looked in the lady's face and burst into tears.

"You are a stranger," said Barbara Fellowes gently. She was returning from a visit to a sick child whose mother lived just outside the lodge of the Towers; though Olive could not see them for the belt of trees between, she had passed at least half-a-dozen cottages which stood just outside Sir George's grounds, and were occupied by his men. Barbara never feared weather, and as she had but very little distance to walk her mother had made no opposition to her errand.

"You are a stranger," repeated Miss Fellowes; "won't you tell me where you are going?"

"I was going to the vicarage—to my uncle and aunt. Father sent me to them, and wrote to tell them I was coming; but they are dead."

Barbara took the girl's trembling hand and drew it through her arm.

"If you are Mr. Melville's niece I am quite sure my mother will be glad to see you. You can't possibly go wandering about alone on such a terrible night as this. Come home with me. You will feel ever so much better after a good night's rest, and in the morning mother will advise you what to do."

Olive could hardly speak her thanks. She was so weary that every step hurt her, and it was only with Barbara's help she could manage the few yards to the lodge and the short walk on to the house.

Miss Fellowes entered by a side door which was unlatched. She took her poor drenched companion into a pretty bedroom, warm with fire and bright with wax candles. She put Olive into a chair close to the hearth and rang the bell for her maid.

"Will you tell me your name?" she whispered kindly. "I can explain so much better to mother."

"Olive Durant—Mrs. Melville was father's sister."

Barbara started.

"Have you come from Whiteladies. I did not think they had a grown-up daughter—besides, they know of the Melville's death."

"Oh, no. I have come from Africa—we looked in the clergy list and saw that Uncle George was still here, so dad thought it would be all right."

Barbara understood. She did not ask the girl a single other question, and when the maid appeared she said gravely,—

"This is Miss Durant, Mary. I want you to help her to undress and get her to bed. The room next this was got ready for Mrs. Johns today. It will be quite aired." Then turning to Olive she said, kindly, "I will come back very soon. I want to go and tell my mother."

She had taken off her cloak and changed her shoes. She stood before Olive now dressed in a soft grey cashmere. Everyone at High Cliff knew that Miss Barbara had given up fashionable

evening toilets. Some two years before she had had a terrible illness. After it was over she had changed her whole course of life. A dutiful daughter and affectionate sister, she yet never joined her family in the pursuit of pleasure. No Bible woman or parish worker could have toiled more unceasingly than Sir George's daughter. Her parents had given up protesting. They seemed reconciled to Barbara's ways, just as they had left off remonstrating with her for her dress, which since her illness had always been black or grey.

The drawing room looked the picture of comfort. Lady Fellowes was dispensing tea, Sir George had challenged Cyril to a game at chess, Percy stood between the chess table and his mother's tea tray.

"I wish Barbara was here," said Lady Fellowes; and then she came in with the soft gliding footsteps which seemed so exactly to suit her.

"Here I am mother. I am so glad I went, for I found a poor girl who had lost her way in the snow, she is a piece of the Melvilles, and had come from Africa to find them; just fancy what a shock it must have been to her to hear of their death."

"By George!" cried Percy, "it must have been the girl we saw in the train; I heard her asking at the station if she could have a fly to go to the vicarage."

"You might have given her a lift," interposed his father.

"I was afraid to offer, I have a wholesome dread of Miss Penelope, this girl was far too attractive not to have been fatal to her peace of mind."

"Mrs. Melville had a brother abroad," said Lady Fellowes; "she told me once it was so many years since they had heard of him she feared he was dead, he was a widower, with one little girl."

"She is not very little now," said Barbara.

"Poor girl what a terrible welcome for her."

"Has she been to the vicarage?"

"Yes—I can't think how Penelope Armitage could send her out on such a night as this," said Barbara.

"I think I had better go and see her," said Lady Fellowes rising; "you are so partial to waifs and strays, Barbara, I generally leave them to you, but I should like to tell this girl she is welcome here for her aunt's sake."

"I told Mary to put her in the room next mine; you know, mother, it was got all ready for Mrs. Johns."

Lady Fellowes met the maid on the stairs. "I am afraid Miss Durant is very ill, my lady, she does nothing but shiver, and she doesn't seem to hear me when I speak to her."

It seemed to Lady Fellowes as she stood beside the bed she had never seen anyone so beautiful as the girl who lay there; her face was colourless as a lily, but the large glorious eyes flashed with a strange feverish light, and the delicate dark brows and lashes only showed up the fairness of the alabaster skin.

Weary, suffering, and sad, this waif might be, but Lady Fellowes felt certain of one thing, if there was a secret in this stranger's past, it had nothing sinful in it. As she stood there, the girl stirred uneasily and a faint weary voice murmured—

"Dad."

Evidently she was unconscious, the terrible exposure to cold, the shock which had met her at the Vicarage had together been all too much for the delicate girl.

Lady Fellowes felt more and more angry with Penelope Armitage for suffering the poor young stranger to be turned away from her inhospitable door.

"Do you feel in pain, dear?" she asked Olive, hoping, though the mind was wandering, the physical sensations might be keen enough to answer her.

"Not much, only so tired, and my head burns. I think I must have walked a long long way, and I want to go home to dad."

"You can't go to him to-night," said the lady, gently, "you must stay with us, and we will do all we can to make you better."

The glittering eyes fixed themselves on Lady

Fellowes with piteous intensity, the thin feverish hand caught hers in a painful burning clasp.

"You are not—Mrs. Wyndham."

"No, I am Lady Fellowes of High Cliff Towers. My daughter found you in the snow."

"I remember, she had an angel's face, but," again the mind was wand'ring, "you won't give me up to him, you promise me, you'll keep me safe for dad."

"I promise you, dear," said Lady Fellowes, solemnly, "no one shall take you away from here without your own consent; and now you must lie quite still and try to go to sleep."

But in the morning, Barbara, who had kept watch by Olive's side through the night, was so terribly alarmed at her state, that, as soon as the servants were up, she sent off a groom for Dr. Harley.

"I'm afraid it's rheumatic fever," he said, as he looked at the girl, "and likely to prove a bad attack. Wouldn't you like to send her to the hospital, Lady Fellowes?"

"No," said the mistress of the Towers, firmly, "my daughter found her, and she shall not be sent away from here till she is well again; besides, she has every claim on me, her aunt was my dear friend, Mrs. Melville."

"Then she is also Mrs. Wyndham's niece?" interposed the doctor. "Would you like me to write to her?"

"I have no opinion of the Wyndhams," said Lady Fellowes; "I saw enough of the cold, cruel charity they meted out to the poor little Melvilles. No, Dr. Harley, we are rich enough not to feel the cost of this illness, and Olive Durant shall stay with us."

Strongly prejudiced against the Wyndhams to begin with, Lady Fellowes had naturally understood poor Olive's prayer, "Don't give me up to him," as an appeal to be saved from her uncle, the lawyer.

Both Barbara and her mother put Olive down as a poor, homeless child, sent to England to claim the grudging charity of her relations; it was the maid, Mary, who undecieved them.

"I never thought they had such things among the blacks, my lady," she said, as Lady Fellowes entered the room where she was putting away Miss Durant's clothes; the wet, dragged skirts having been carefully dried and brushed. "Why the handkerchief and underlinen are as fine and dainty as your own."

Lady Fellowes glanced at the things Mary was placing in a drawer. It was quite true, the finest French cambric trimmed with real lace, formed the under wear; the silk stockings and many buttoned French boots, the handsome fur-lined cloak, the ring with its half hoop of diamonds, the exquisite jewelled watch; all these were not likely to be owned by a poverty-stricken little tramp.

"Was there anything in the pocket, Mary?" asked the elder lady.

"Only the handkerchief and this purse, my lady. I was going to ask you to take charge of it; it feels heavy."

It might well do so, for besides some silver and a key there were twenty pounds in gold and two bank notes; Lady Fellowes also found a railway cloak-room ticket which seemed to refer to a portmanteau left at High Cliff station the night before.

"We must send down for it," she told Barbara; "there may be some clue in it as to her father's address. After her passionate entreaty that I would not give her up to the Wyndhams, I don't like to write to them; but, don't you see, Barbara, if she is a rich man's heiress, the case is very different to that of a poor girl sent to England to plead for her relations' charity."

"I suppose so," said Barbara. "I wish she had not come from Africa, mother."

Her mother must have understood the strange speech, for she kissed the sad face and murmured,—

"Oh, Barbara, Barbara! will you never forget!"

CHAPTER V.

MR. WYNDHAM went down to High Cliff the very day he received the letter David Durant

had written to his dead brother-in-law; he went first to the Vicarage and asked to see Mr. Arncliffe.

Not being of the dangerous sex, Miss Penelope allowed her brother to receive this visitor without her assistance; in fact, the usually meek Vicar had expressed himself so strongly at her sending Miss Durant from his door on that bitter winter's night that she really did not wish to see the girl's uncle.

"I think I can guess your errand," said the young clergyman, as he shook hands with Mr. Wyndham; "you have come to inquire about a young lady who arrived here on Wednesday night, believing the Melvilles still alive?"

"Just so," said the lawyer; "the dear girl is the sole heiress of an enormous fortune, and has been sent to England for the benefit of her health. I perfectly dread to think what effect the sudden shock awaiting her here may have had."

The "enormous fortune" was a conclusion of his own, but as chance happened it was right.

"I am very sorry; I don't think I ever felt more ashamed in my life. I was from home at the time, and my sister, who distrusts all strangers, instead of offering Miss Durant hospitality at least for the night, suffered her to leave this house. It was snowing deeply, there was not another train out of the station that evening, and in trying to reach a cottage where she had been recommended lodgings, Miss Durant lost her way; happily she was found by Miss Fellowes near the lodge, and is now in safety at the Towers, where I am grieved to learn she is very ill."

Tom Wyndham never made needless enemies, and he did not blame Miss Penelope to her brother.

"If people will do impulsive things, they can't expect not to suffer from them. Why in the name of goodness couldn't my brother-in-law have written a mail or two before he sent the girl, or have called even, he's rich enough. He was always an eccentric fellow. Went out twenty years ago almost a pauper, and now, judging from his letter to poor Melville, he's made a very large fortune."

Mr. Arncliffe smiled.

"There seemed to me something almost pathetic in such faith in a brother-in-law not seen for twenty years. You will stay to tea I hope, Mr. Wyndham, my sister will be delighted to put you up for the night."

But the lawyer refused; a toady to his fingertips, he preferred the baronet's hospitality, and so drove on (he had managed to get a fly) to the Towers.

Lady Fellowes herself received him, and he was not much pleased with her manner.

Miss Durant, she told him, was dangerously ill, and the doctor ordered perfect quiet as his only chance of recovery. It would be weeks before she could be moved, or even allowed to speak on any exciting topic; Lady Fellowes had herself written to Mr. Durant to tell him of his daughter's state, and she would keep the young lady under her own care until she recovered.

"But I can't impose so on your kindness," said the lawyer. "My wife is the girl's nearest relation, and I am quite willing to take her in."

"As Mr. Durant is evidently a rich man, I have no doubt his daughter would meet with every kindness from his relations," said Lady Fellowes very coldly; "but as the doctor forbids her being moved, I shall keep her here for the present."

"Can I see her?"

"It is quite impossible; any strange face would probably excite her dangerously."

There was nothing to be gained by waiting, Lady Fellowes did not offer him a bed or even invite him to stay to dinner. Mr. Wyndham drove seven miles to a junction and so caught a London train that night, and returned home early the next morning in the worst possible temper.

"Mark my words, Grace," he said to his wife, "there's something wrong about that girl; a mere exposure to cold wouldn't bring on such an illness as this; excitement doesn't hurt people who have only got a chill. Depend upon it in spite of the money in the letter, Olive Durant is

under a cloud. Her father was nothing but a humiliation to us all the while he was in England, and this girl will be just the same."

"Well, we need not see her," replied Mrs. Wyndham cheerfully, "if the Fellowes have taken the charge of her on themselves, let them keep it."

Dr. Harley was right; Olive Durant had a long and tedious illness; it was the end of February when she came to the Towers, it was early April when they wheeled her sofa for the first time into Lady Fellowes' boudoir, and pronounced her convalescent.

"You have been so good to me," she said to her hostess with almost pathetic gratitude, "you and Miss Fellowes, I don't know how to thank you; if only dad were here he would do it better."

The listeners' eyes filled with tears; among the African letters waiting for Olive was one in a crabbed old-fashioned writing, with a deep black border, the week it had arrived the London papers had recorded:—"January 30th, at Cape Town, suddenly of heart disease, David Lester Durant, youngest son of the late Ernest Durant, of Whitefields, Hertfordshire, England," so those around her knew of Olive's misfortune long before she learned the news herself.

"Hasn't dad written?" asked Olive wistfully, "he promised me a letter by every mail."

They brought her a packet of letters, but only one was in her father's hand, the others were from Dr. Evans, his eldest friend at Port Agnes, and the only creature he had trusted not only with the secret of his parentage, but with that other secret of the months Olive had been away from him.

The summons had come suddenly; within a week of his child's departure, David Lester Durant had been "called home." The sole executor of his will was Dr. Evans, who wrote that as Olive was now of age trustees would not be necessary, and he proposed to realize the whole property as soon as possible, and pay the proceeds over to her credit at any English bank she might choose.

"You will be very rich, little girl," wrote the kind old doctor; "and I fear you will feel very lonely among strangers; but I dare not advise you to return to Port Agnes. If you will take the counsel of an old man who has known you all your life, make your home, at any rate for the present, under some relation's roof. You are too young to live alone. For the rest avoid all sudden intimacies and keep yourself as much as possible away from the places frequented by Colonials. I would gladly ask you to come out again and live with us. My wife and the girl would be delighted to have you; but when your father and I discussed the matter, he expressed such a decided wish for you to live in England that I think you are bound to do so."

They were very kind to Olive—the family among whom she found her lot so strangely cast. Even Sir George, who did not affect young ladies as a rule, took a strange interest in Barbara's foundling, as he called Olive; he it was who wrote to Dr. Evans detailing Miss Durant's illness, and the death of the relations to whom her father had specially confided her.

He gave the address of his own solicitors, a respectable firm, who would be likely to deal honourably with the orphan heiress, and assured his correspondent he should not hear of Miss Durant's leaving his roof until her health was perfectly restored.

Of course the Wyndhams could not be kept in ignorance of Mr. Durant's death. They sent Olive the most pressing invitations to visit them at Penge, and among the letters from Adelaide House came a little note, in which Alice Melville expressed her sorrow such a disappointment should have met her cousin at her dear old home, and her certainty that had her parents been alive they would gladly have welcomed their niece.

"I think Alice Melville must be nice," said Olive, thoughtfully, to Barbara Fellowes.

"She used to be a dear little thing," agreed Miss Fellowes, "she was almost heartbroken when her home was broken up. I have often thought she must have a hard time of it at Penge."

"Do you think she would come and live with me?"

"With you!" Lady Fellowes laughed pleasantly. "My dear Olive, it would be like two children playing at housekeeping."

Olive flushed crimson.

"I don't know much about English ways," she confessed; "but I thought, perhaps, I could get some old lady to come and look after the house, and Alice would be a companion for me. Her father was very good to dad years ago, and if I am really so rich I should like to try and make some one happy."

"You might take that pretty house between here and the Vicarage. I know they are trying to let it furnished. Colonel Scott wants to take his wife abroad for her health. Mamma, don't you think it would be a lovely plan?"

"I should like to keep Olive near us," said Lady Fellowes, kindly; "but this is a very small place, and she is a great heiress. I think most people would say she ought to see the world."

"Not yet," pleaded Olive, "I couldn't be gay and pleasure-seeking yet while I have only just lost dad. I should like to spend the summer here very much. Lady Fellowes, do you think I might take High Cliff Lodge, and get Alice Melville to come to me?"

"I think Mrs. Wyndham would give her up rather than offend you, dear, as fate seems to have made you the rich woman of the family; but you would want a *chaperon*; even in a quiet place like this two girls could not possibly live alone."

"I think it would be charming," said Barbara, as she rose to leave the room. "Olive seems to belong to us now, mother, and I don't want to give her up."

Lady Fellowes looked thoughtful.

"Supposing you went to Penge for a fortnight, Olive, and saw your Aunt Grace. I feel sure she would give up Alice if you wished it, and I think she would probably know of someone who would come to you for a time as *chaperon* and housekeeper."

Olive's glance seemed to say she would prefer Lady Fellowes' choice of that—to Mrs. Wyndham's.

"No dear," said the lady, gently, "your aunt is already very jealous of us. If you had been a lonely little girl, whose fate was her fortune, I might have defied Mrs. Wyndham's criticism; but as it is I should like you to consult her. You need have no fears, Olive, I know her well enough to assure you she will be graciousness itself to an heiress."

So in May Olive went to the red brick house at Penge, and was treated with much deference. Mrs. Wyndham seemed to have forgotten her doubts about her niece, and to think the heiress a very important person. She thought taking a house in Yorkshire burying Olive alive; but she admitted no one in deep mourning went out much, and she dare say they would be tired of the quiet before winter, and when Olive, to whom all children, even the unruly Totty, took a fancy, suggested it would be so pleasant for the little girls to pay her a long visit in the summer holidays Mrs. Wyndham was quite won over.

About a *chaperon* she recommended an advertisement, and greatly advised the selection of a stranger.

"Anyone from near High Cliff would know too much about the neighbours. I wonder Lady Fellowes did not recommend someone. She seems quite to have taken possession of you."

"She has been very very kind."

"She is a nice woman," admitted Mrs. Wyndham, rather grudgingly, "and they have had heaps of trouble. Is Miss Fellowes getting over it?"

"Getting over what?" asked Olive, rather bewildered. "She seems quite well. She does not care for society, but is always working in the parish."

"Ah," Mrs. Wyndham looked volumes.

"That's a new thing. Three years ago she was the loveliest girl in the neighbourhood and the gayest too. She might have married anyone, she was so run after; but, in an evil hour, Sir George took it into his head he wanted a secretary (his own son was still at college), and brought home a young man who seemed to in-

fatuate everyone he met. I saw Robert Larg myself, when I was staying with your aunt, and I am sure I'll admit he was the most fascinating young fellow I ever met."

Olive's eyes were bent over her needlework. Mrs. Wyndham was pleased at such wrapt attention to the embroidery of Totty's dress.

"He was just Sir George's right hand. Mr. Percy, the heir, and Lady Fellowes were quite as much taken with him at first; but by-and-by they began to think he assumed too much, and when it came to Sir George keeping a hunter for him, and treating him more as a favourite son than a paid secretary, they were both up in arms. Percy Fellowes had just left Oxford, and he came up to London and lived in chambers, vowing he wouldn't go to the Towers to play second fiddle to Robert Lang. Lady Fellowes fretted herself nearly ill over the estrangement between the father and son. Sir George grew more infatuated every day, till at last Lang proposed to Miss Fellowes."

"To Barbara?"

"Yes; she who had refused the best matches in the county, accepted him at once; but he had over-reached himself. Sir George, who had seemed to think nothing too good for his *protégé*, was yet enraged at Lang aspiring to his daughter; there was the most awful row and Lang was dismissed."

"Percy Fellowes went home, and the family lawyer was sent for. When affairs were gone into it was found Lang had cheated Sir George right and left. Rents paid him had never been accounted for. Other moneys passing through his hands had been embezzled, the very day he was dismissed, he had forged Sir George Fellowes' name to a cheque for a large sum. Altogether they lost fifteen thousand pounds by him, and Miss Fellowes had a most terrible illness, from which no one ever thought she would recover."

"And what became of the man?"

"He went abroad. Nothing was heard of him till this year, when it transpired he had gone (with the proceeds of the forged cheque) to South Africa, and mixed in the very best society out there as Vane Carlyon; he seems to have taken in everyone wherever he went till, presuming too much on his good luck, he was concerned in some theft of uncut diamonds and got seven years penal servitude. I wonder you didn't hear of the trial. Perhaps you were on your voyage when it happened?"

"I never read the African papers," said Olive, "there was so little in them."

"Well, when Robert Lang has finished his seven years he will probably return to England, but if he's wise in his generation, he'll steer clear of High Cliff. They say Sir George is so furious against him that, if he ventures near him, the old gentleman has sworn to give him in charge for the forgery."

"But could he," asked Alice doubtfully; "I have heard that if a certain number of years passed—six, I think—a person could not be prosecuted."

"You are thinking of debts, my dear, six years is the limit for them, but criminal affairs are very different."

"Do you feel the sun from that window too hot, Olive," asked Alice Melville gently, "you are looking as white as a ghost."

"I think I am tired," said the girl wearily; "if you don't mind, Aunt Grace, I'll go and lie down."

Mrs. Wyndham turned to Alice when the heiress had left the room.

"She'll never make old bones," was the cold-blooded speech, "she's too like her mother; why she looks as if a puff of wind would blow her away, and she's worth a hundred thousand pounds now, and no telling how much more when her father's affairs are wound up. If you play your cards well, Alice, and prevent Olive from marrying, the whole of her fortune must come to us."

Alice started.

"It seems cruel to think of such a thing," she said gently; "but surely you are mistaken, Aunt Grace. Olive's fortune is not like landed property, she could leave it by will to whoever she pleased."

Mrs. Wyndham snapped her cotton impatiently, a sure sign that she was displeased.

"I never said she couldn't, but she won't make a will unless you put it into her head. Girls of that age never think they may die as well as old people. If she does not marry, and you don't bother her about a will, her fortune will be divided into three parts. I shall have one, your Uncle Alfred another, and the third you and poor Ada's other children would divide."

"Please don't," pleaded Alice, "she is so sweet and beautiful I can't bear to think about her death."

"It won't make her die any the sooner," said Mrs. Wyndham; "there would be nearly six thousand pounds apiece for your children, think what a start in life it would give your brothers Alice. And you and Edith would find a nice little dowry very useful if you married."

"I don't think I shall ever marry, Aunt Grace, and I would much rather Olive lived and enjoyed her own fortune."

"Then you're a simpleton," returned her aunt.

Later on Alice crept into her cousin's room to see if she was resting. Olive sat in a low chair by the open window. She had not been asleep. There were tear stains on her white cheeks, and her eyes were dull and heavy; for the first time it struck Alice how terribly fragile Olive looked. There was almost a protecting kindness in the younger girl's manner as she flung her strong young arms round Olive, and begged her not to fret.

"Uncle David is better off," said Alice, gently, "there's no trouble in Heaven. I always try to remember that, Olive, when I long for my mother."

"I wasn't crying for dad," said Olive sadly, "but for myself, Alice, I am so very tired of life, it seems so full of pain."

"You mustn't say so, dearest," pleaded the other girl, "you are weak and ill now, you haven't got over the shock of uncle's death. You'll feel better and see some sunshine left in life by-and-by."

Olive shook her head.

"Everyone seems full of trouble," she said gravely, "even the Fellowes. I thought they were so happy, and yet you heard Aunt Grace's story—can it possibly be true?"

"It is perfectly true; I was old enough at the time to remember it myself. Mother said Robert Lang had the most fascinating manners she had ever seen, but father always declared there was something wrong about him, and that he did not 'run straight.'"

"Had he any relations?" asked Olive, then as though to explain her curiosity, she added, "his disgrace must have been terrible for them."

"He had one sister," said Alice, "I never saw her, and I do not think she visited at the Towers; she was a very handsome young widow, I have heard."

"And her name?" asked Olive, with strange abruptness.

"I never heard it."

(To be continued.)

AN Oxford library has a manuscript containing the whole Bible. It is written on a piece of parchment so thin, and the writing is so minute, that the whole, when rolled up, is neatly packed away in the shell of a common walnut.

JAPANESE women have strange ideas of adding to their beauty. They shave off their eyebrows, and have pencilled ones with an exaggerated arch. They paint their lips a vivid crimson, with a patch of gold in the centre, and their faces a chalky white. The peasant girl, of course, cannot afford all this decoration, and must be content with her own rosy cheeks and tanned skin. The Japanese esthetic cleanliness more than modesty. In Tokio there are about eight hundred baths, where some three thousand people bathe every day. These baths were enjoyed by both sexes without division until the present emperor ordered a separation to be made in all public baths. The people obeyed by placing a rope across the top of the water.

LADY RAVENHILL'S SECRET.

—30:—

CHAPTER XXXI.—(continued.)

"As Hugh stood for a moment, stunned almost by the shock, Lord Firstflight, who was a young man of action, seeing that 'the game was up,' to use his own expression, sprang out of the compartment with extraordinary celerity, and vanished among the crowd upon the platform.

"Will you get in here, sir?" said the guard, impatiently, "there ain't another seat."

"Yes, Hugh," said Eleanor, stretching out both her hands, "get in here. You must, or if you don't I'll get out."

"Here, sir, there is no time to lose, we are ten minutes late; look sharp, if you please!" impatiently.

And before another moment he found himself hustled into the carriage with his wife, and followed by three other passengers, almost driving him before them; the door was shut, and once more they were off.

He was seated opposite to his wife in the far corner, and he could scarcely realise the situation. What did it mean? Alas! it could only mean one thing.

She was no longer fit to bear the name of Ravenhill and had placed herself beyond the pale of all respectable society.

His conviction was written plainly upon his face, as with his hat pulled low over his brows, his arms folded, he surveyed his *vis-à-vis* in absolute silence—a silence which lasted for what seemed fully an hour to her—but was probably a fourth of that time.

At last it became unendurable, and she leant forward and said in a strange voice,—

"Won't you speak to me, Hugh?"

"No, why should I?"

"Why do you look at me as if I were some guilty wretch?" she cried. "What are you thinking of me?"

"Tell me the truth!" he said, also leaning forward, and speaking in an impressive tone. "I would not have believed it, only for the evidence of my own eyes. You were running away with that scoundrel—nay, you may have run away with him weeks ago for all I know—and I have just discovered the fact by chance."

"It is not true!" she answered, with her face aflame. "How could you think me capable of such a thing?"

"Easily. It is a mere bagatelle, to what you have put down to me. If you think that I am going to take you back, or give you the future shelter of my name and protection, you are mistaken. Go your own way and I will go mine. After we descend from this carriage I will never see you or speak to you again—and I mean it."

"I am innocent of even the thought of evil; appearances are against me, but that is all!" she whispered, excitedly.

"And when appearances were against me you did not say 'and that was all,'" he returned, with a bitter smile. "Now you and I have changed places, and you shall be judged by your own standard."

"But, hear me," she pleaded, rising and taking the seat next him, seeing that three pairs of eyes were bent in evident curiosity on the exciting colloquy that was going on across the carriage. "Hear me before you judge me."

"That is more than you ever did for me."

"Just listen to me calmly," she replied, not noticing the interruption. "I have never, never spoken to Lord Firstflight not once since I saw you till to-day. Although he called and persecuted me with messages and attentions, my doors were always shut to him."

She paused for a moment for breath, and to try and steady her trembling voice, and then went on hurriedly,—

"I was in town to-day on business, and at the station I met him, and he asked if he might come in the same carriage. What could I say but yes. How could I help that?"

"How, indeed!" sneered her auditor.

"And I, knowing so little of London or travelling, and being always so stupid about these

things, allowed him to put me in a carriage in the wrong train, and I never discovered the mistake till we were miles from London. And when I did, I was just going to get out when I saw you, and that is all—all—I swear to you! You believe me, don't you, Hugh?" she asked, breathlessly, and with imploring eyes.

"I," he answered, in a mocking tone, "no more believe you than you used to believe me! I believe it is a tale, cleverly made up on the spur of the moment, of which every syllable is false—that is what I believe!" drawing himself away from her with an impressive gesture. "Now we are quits!"

"But I can prove that I only left home this morning!" she returned, excitedly. "You can track me foot by foot to the railway station. I am telling you the simple truth."

"Yes, but I don't want to track you. I really have no interest in your movements now," he said, calmly. "I leave all that kind of thing now to other people."

At this moment the sudden shrill whistling of the engine and violent oscillation of the train caused one of their fellow-passengers to start to his feet, and thrust his head out of the window; but ere he had time to speak there was a loud roar—a crash—the carriage in which they were seated seemed to be upheaved.

She felt Hugh rise and throw himself between her and something—what she could not tell—and then there was a violent blow, a singing in her ears, and she remembered no more.

When she awoke she found herself lying on a bare wooden settle, in an empty-looking, little waiting-room, with half-a-dozen strange faces peering into hers.

"She's not much the worse, only stunned and shaken," said a bald, little man with a large shirt frill. "Never mind her, look after some of the others."

And presently, assisted by a good-natured looking woman, she sat up, felt if her head was really still on her body, that none of her bones were apparently broken, and began to look round, and try to collect her scattered wits.

Two or three other people were lying in the room, and more seemed about to be brought in, carried on stretchers by staggering porters or country people. Out on the platform all seemed confusion.

"What has happened?" she asked, in a faint voice, putting her hand to her head. "And where am I?"

"At Bekerford station, miss—a little station on the main line. There 'ave been an awful accident about two miles up; the express ran into a goods at a shunting, going fifty miles an hour too. You came off lucky, that you did! They say there be above twenty people killed, and double the number badly hurt."

"And where are these people and the other passengers?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Passengers is mostly gone into the village looking for lodgings; them as can walk," she added, "but the others is being brought in gradual-like, as they can find hands and stretchers. The one you were in, the compartment, miss, was as much smashed as if it were a bandbox. They took you out for dead like all the others."

"But the others are not dead, are they—not all?" with blanched lips.

"Dead they be, stone cold, every one. I hope there are none of your friends among 'em. It were a shocking sight," dwelling with unction on the details that she had gleaned. "One man had his head taken clean off! Dear me, miss, you're never going off again! Keep up, keep up, there's a good lady. We must try and get you over to Mrs. Bonner's—the inn is full."

At this moment there was a kind of commotion outside, and a sort of stampede on the platform. Eleanor's attendant rushed to the door and closed it.

"Nay! don't stir; you mustn't move," to her charge, who was struggling to her feet.

"I must; I must go out there!" she returned huskily. "I must see for myself!"

"Deed, and you can't do anything of the

sort," replied the other, sharply, interposing her portly person between her ladyship and the doorway. "There's nothing there that concerns you, and you must just lie down and keep yourself quiet for a longer spell."

"But, my good woman, I must see and know if my husband is safe!" she said, making a sudden swift movement towards the platform. "Open that door, for pass out I will."

"Your husband, stay a moment, dearie! What's he like?"

But in spite of her detaining efforts Eleanor had wrenched the door handle out of her grasp and passed out into the station.

It was a ghastly sight—the platform. Several long, prone, motionless forms lay in different places waiting removal, mercifully hidden from the shrinking eye by pieces of tarpauling or coarse sackings. These were some of the dead who were past human care; the living were conveyed away on boards, mattresses, stretchers; and two or three little groups with lanterns were assembled in various directions round something.

In spite of her late companion's expostulations Eleanor made her way to the nearest and joined in the circle, though a rough-looking navy said in a gruff tone—"You'd better not come here, miss, 'tis no place for you; 'tis a terrible smashing he got, poor chap."

"Take her out of that," said a doctor, impatiently, who was kneeling with his back to her, but seemed all the same aware of her presence.

"I cannot go," she returned firmly, "not till I find my husband."

"Then let her pass; prepare yourself for the worst, madam!" said the surgeon, turning round, and a little gap was made for her into which she stepped with beating heart, and saw lying on a piece of canvas at her feet a scarcely breathing fellow-creature. His features were almost unrecognisable from the blood which streamed from a cut in his head; but it was not Hugh, she felt with a kind of overwhelming gasp of relief—it was Lord Firstflight!

"He's not your man, I see," said a rough voice, kindly. "Maybe he's all right—what was he like?"

"He was—is—I mean, tall, dark, and wore a brown suit."

"Young? with a black moustache?"

"Yes!"

"Ah! then they have got him up at Mrs. Bonner's. He is badly hurt, I believe, but he's not dead."

"Oh, then, tell me where I can find him. Show me the way to Mrs. Bonner's, my good man."

"Mrs. Bonner's is a pretty good step from here. It's a red farmhouse about a quarter of a mile off, but there was no more room in the inn; this man will be took there too if he doesn't die on the way," jerking his thumb towards the body on the platform. "I'll step up with you though, if you like, as you must be in a way, poor soul."

So saying Eleanor's new acquaintance shoved a lane for her and himself through the gathering crowd, and led the way out of the station.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LADY RAVENHILL and her guide made their way out into the narrow little country road at the back of the station, and then along the street of a tiny village a few hundred yards in length, containing only small low-roofed red houses—one or two of a better sort—and what her leader pointed out as the inn, whose waving sign-post signified that it was the hostelry of the place, "and chock-full," he added; and indeed all round the door and overflowing out into the street there seemed to be a swarm of people.

It was about ten o'clock at night now, but from the traffic up and down the little thoroughfare no one would have guessed at the lateness of the hour.

Everyone had woke up to midday energy, to walk about and talk with solemn faces of the accident—the accident which made this sleepy little out of the way place for once in its life the centre of throbbing excitement.

There was no moon, but the dark cool sky was sprinkled with stars, and there was light enough from them to guide Eleanor along after the countryman—out quite into the open country it seemed—between two very high hedges, and at last through a gate into an immense yard that appeared to be surrounded with big buildings, and belonging to a large rambling house with great stacks of chimneys and many windows. In some of the upper ones lights were to be seen—lights flitting from room to room, and the back door stood wide open, and emitted a stream of illumination into the quiet, dark yard.

Eleanor entered without ceremony, and found about a dozen people sitting on settles or chairs, or standing round the fire.

All eyes were at once turned upon the new arrival—a tall young lady in a long velvet coat, trimmed with fur, with a ghastly face, frightened eyes, streaming hair, and a hat bent out of all shape or form.

Giles, which was the name of her guide, introduced her in a kind of way to the funeral company by saying,—

"This 'ere lady has come a-looking for her husband. I believe he's the feller that was brought up here awhile back—a cove with dark hair, and youngish."

"Aye, he's 'ere right enough," said a voice from near the fire; "the doctor's with him now."

"And can I see him?" said Eleanor, eagerly. "Can I go to him?"

"I would say as you could, ma'am. This is the gentleman's wife, Sally," nodding to a small, brisk, apple-cheeked woman, who had just come in, "and she's asking if she can see him?"

"If you will come with me," said the woman, holding the door in her hand, "I'll ask the doctor; but I won't say as he'll allow anyone in the room whatever."

"Oh, surely he will give me admittance," said her guest, following her upstairs with unsteady steps. "Tell me," pausing on the first landing and looking her in the face, "tell me—is he—very bad?" bringing out the question with a gasp.

"Aye, dear me, I'm afraid he is. It would be no kindness to deceive you; but we all know that whilst there's life there's hope!"

Lady Ravenhill leant against the wall for a few seconds with her hands over her face; and then, having summoned up all her nerve and all her resolution, motioned to Mrs. Bonner that she was ready to go on again. And on they went, down a queer, crooked long passage till they came to a door at which Mrs. Bonner rapped with her bony knuckles, and Eleanor with a sickening heart was admitted into the sick room.

Yes, this time it was Hugh—and no other. She advanced to the foot of the little iron bed, and holding the rails at the bottom in her hands, so as to steady herself, she looked down on the perfectly insensible form of her husband. He was not disfigured, not a hideous ghastly sight like the poor wretch who was at that moment being borne down the passage, with the tramp, tramp, of heavy-booted feet—but he looked as if he was dead.

"It's concussion of the brain," said the doctor, gravely—the same little doctor with the frill, whom she had seen before; "several ribs broken, too, and a fracture of the forearm. I don't mind the bones so much; it's the head we have to fear for!"

Eleanor could not reply. She felt a huge lump in her throat choking her, or as if an iron hand had been grasping her neck.

"Lady Ravenhill, I presume," said the doctor, after a pause; "we found his lordship's card."

A nod of acquiescence was her only reply.

"Well, he has youth in his favour, and seemingly a fine constitution," said the doctor, cheerfully, "and we must only hope for the best. He may pull through, but absolute quiet is essential, and we must have a trained nurse at once."

"Cannot I—?"

"You!" interrupted the doctor, impatiently. "Excuse me, my dear madam, but this is no case for an amateur, but a first-rate professional; and, for one thing, you look more a subject for a nurse

yourself than anything else. I shall send you up a composing draught, and you are to go to bed. You have had a shock to your system I can see with half-an-eye. Get to bed without delay. I cannot make out how you escaped as you did either—no bones broken, no bruises to speak of—for you were in the far corner of the carriage that was frightfully smashed. I saw you taken out myself, and I said to myself, 'there's another past praying for.'"

"And the other people in the carriage?" she faltered. "Were they—?"

"Yes, yes," finishing off the sentence; "every-one of them except you and him."

"And he saved me!" she said, as if speaking to herself.

"No doubt he did. The iron roofing came on him. Well, it was as well it did, for it would have killed you on the spot. And now I must ask you one thing as a favour—keep out of this room as much as possible. Your presence may only excite him, and it is a matter of life and death—life and death, my dear madam, that he is kept as quiet as possible. The brain must have rest. And now, Mrs. Bonner, will you take this lady to her room?" and with a last lingering look Eleanor was dismissed.

For several days she was unable to rise from her bed.

Her reaction had set in. She was so weak, and so stiff, she could hardly move.

She received bulletins almost every hour from Mrs. Bonner, always of a rose-coloured tint. He was better. He was mending. No, he had not come to his senses yet.

A woman who said she had been his own nurse when he was a baby was with him, an elderly person, but very smart in her ways, and a dragon, who would let no one but the doctor set a foot inside her room.

The other patients were, some better, some buried.

That other young man was horribly bad; his moans and groans kept half the house awake at nights. He had but small chance, poor chap.

Eleanor, like Mrs. Dombey "made an effort" and got up and dressed herself, in spite of both Mrs. Bonner and the doctor, and made her way to her husband's room; but even the name of Lady Ravenhill was no open sesame in this instance.

A handsome, portly, respectable-looking elderly woman came out into the passage, closing the door carefully after her.

"Lady Ravenhill, I believe," she said, dropping an old-fashioned curtsy; "his lordship is much the same."

"But can't I go in and see him?" asked Lady Ravenhill.

"No, no, my lady. What would be the good? He knows no one."

"Oh, do let me in for one moment! Just for one moment, I'll make no noise."

"No, mum, I can't!" putting her back to the door.

"But I am his wife," cried Eleanor, impatiently. "and I insist on going in! What right have you to keep me? Who are you?"

"I am Mary Murray, that held him in my arms the day he was born—that was his mother's maid, and then his nurse—that lived in the family twenty years—that's who I am. As to right, and wife, your ladyship knows as well as I do how little call you have to talk in that way. 'Twas an ill day for him when he put the ring on your finger—and you can't pass into this room unless it be over my body!"

"How can you be so insolent!" cried Eleanor, no less astonished than annoyed; but suddenly bethinking herself that the threshold of a sick room was scarcely a proper place for a quarrel she softened down.

After all, this woman was doing her best for Hugh, and was fond of him, and from her point of view was right.

So making a struggle with her temper, she said,—

"Very well, Mrs. Murray, as long as you look after him, and nurse him back to health—I—I—will not trouble you."

Without another word, she turned about and

went away, very slowly, steadying herself by the passage wall as she walked, whilst Mrs. Murray stood with arms akimbo, glaring defiantly after her.

"So that's Lady Ravenhill! Lady Eleanor that was. She looks bad enough herself. She sees there is no use trying to get over Mary Murray, and like a wise woman she leaves it alone. Well—well!" returning to her post, "she looks desperately ill, maybe it's remorse that's in her mind now. 'Tis a bad bargain you have in her, I'm thinking!" she said aloud to the motionless figure in the bed. "If she was to die, it would be a rare job for you. She's not bad looking, and has the Ravenhill face; but what's looks!" once more taking up her knitting with renewed energy and knitting away with flying needles.

Shut out from the sick-room, Eleanor was then entirely upon her own resources for means to pass those long, sunny empty April days. Lord Firstflight had been removed to the now empty "George Inn," and she and her husband were the only strangers under Mrs. Bonner's red-tiled roof.

Every morning and evening she humbly waited outside the sick room for such crumbs of comfort as Mrs. Murray was disposed to throw to her, and that hardy dame was not a little softened by this beggar at her gates.

She began to think better of her—more especially when Mrs. Bonner was loud in her praises, telling how she was no more trouble in a house than if she wasn't in it, how easily pleased in every way how good to her daughter!

No grand, big houses were in the neighbourhood—no callers came with kind inquiries to break the monotony of the weary days.

There was no library, of course, only a few well-thumbed books of sermons, and a tattered copy of "Robinson Crusoe" with which to beguile the weary hours.

Hugh was getting better.

He was conscious, his bones were knitting, but still the dragon watched his threshold.

And now the great fear taken off her mind, Eleanor began to leave her odd three-cornered room, and to walk about the lanes and fields, to wander afar and afield with Mrs. Bonner's fourteen-year-old granddaughter to pick wild flowers in big bunches, and to return with muddy boots and wet petticoats, a fine, healthy appetite, in time for her rural, but substantial meal of six o'clock tea.

In the mornings she amused herself by teaching this girl Maggie writing, arithmetic, and fancy sewing.

The afternoons they went out together, and in the evenings Mrs. Bonner herself sometimes came and sat beside her fire.

She pitied this lonely young wife. She wondered why she was debarred from the sick-room, and she admired her good temper, her pretty face, and her odd forbearance.

She had thrown out a few hints to Mrs. Murray, who had now relaxed into taking her tea downstairs, but she might as well have hinted to the kitchen chimney.

She did boldly venture to ask "if the lord upstairs had anything bad against the lady," and to this query she was relieved to hear a gruff negative.

"Nothing light in her conduct, eh?" emboldened by success.

"She's a Ravenhill herself," returned Mrs. Murray, as if that alone would vouch for all the virtues.

"But they do seem a queer pair!" ventured Mrs. Bonner.

"Aye! I'm not saying there's not *that*," stirring her tea.

"No family, I suppose?"

"No," snappishly; "no family."

"Aye! that's always a pity, especially when there's a title!"

"Yes, and when he's the last of his name."

"Deary me! got no brothers, nor nothing?"

"No, not a soul!"

"And has she no people?"

"Not a creature belonging to her except *him*."

"Aye, dear me! it's sad to see a fine family dwindle down and die out. It was a narrow thing for them both in the accident."

"Yes, that it were; but it would—Heaven forgive me for saying it—have been no great loss if she had been taken; he could easily get another wife."

"Laws, Mrs. Murray! how can you bring your tongue to give out such a thing!" said her companion, setting down her saucer and looking unutterably shocked. "It's nearly murder!"

"Murder! It would have been the hand of Providence to my mind!"

"Poor young lady! what harm is she doing! Anyway, you see, it was *him*, not *her*, that was near going; and what would you have called that?"

"I know what I'm talking about," said Mrs. Murray, rising, and shaking the crumbs from her apron into the fireplace. "I've known him, baby, boy, and man, just as if he was my own son! He was a bit wild in his day, when he was an officer, like the rest of them; but there's no harm in him. And, you believe me, he has more good in his little finger than she has in her whole body!"

"Deary me!" cried Mrs. Bonner, taking up the cudgels for her client. "He must be the best man, then, that ever drew the breath of life! You know him, and I know *her*, there's where the difference lies; and I think a nicer, a milder, nor a better lady never stepped!"

"Well, well, I can't stay here all day drawing out their characters!" said Mrs. Murray, with her hands on her hips. "And, to let you into a secret, I can't keep her out of the sick-room much longer. The doctor is an old, talking, gossiping idiot. He has been and told him that his wife is here—been here this three weeks, and very anxious about him. And now he's always asking for her, and saying he wants to see her, and I don't know how I'm to put him off much longer, for he is just as headstrong as when he was ten years old."

"But how have you managed to quiet him up to now?"

"Oh, lots of ways! I don't want her coming, and arguing, and talking, and exciting him now he is on the turn. She'll maybe be working him into a rage, and throw him back weeks, if not into his grave. I always say she is out when he asks—either out or sick!"

"Merciful patience! Mrs. Murray; but you are a free woman with your tongue, and don't stick at a trifle!"

"Stick at a trifle! No, nor never did, when Master Hugh was to be served. And now, if you'll give me that cup of chicken broth, I'll just take it up, and stand over him while he swallows it. He's getting as hard to manage now as a two-year-old colt, and saying he won't take this and that; but he knows that there's no use in his talking when he has to deal with Mary Murray!" Exit, tray in hand, with slow and majestic deportment; and honest Mrs. Bonner began to collect the tea-things, and to digest a few of the items of news that she had gleaned from her late companion.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FRESH from her interview with Mrs. Murray, Mrs. Bonner went upstairs to take "a look," as she called it, at Lady Ravenhill's fire.

She was sitting by it, in the dusk, her head sunk forward on her breast, her hands idly clasped in her lap—altogether in an attitude of the deepest dejection.

Poor, friendless, young creature! Mrs. Bonner's heart went out to her at once, and she bustled about stirred up a good blaze, swept the hearth, and hurrying away down to her own premises, returned with the tea brewed extra strong, accompanied by fresh brown bread, hot from the oven, fresh butter, and thick, yellow cream.

If that old Jezebel upstairs was going to stand over him whilst he took his chicken broth, she would stand over her and see that she made a good tea—for a sparrow would have starved on her dinner—tea was despatched in a better fashion, and the things carried away.

Mrs. Bonner still remained hanging about the room, making a feint of dusting where no dust

existed, dropping little remarks from time to time—for that lonely figure, sitting evening after evening by the fire, without a soul to speak to, made her heart ache. She would keep her company, just in a kind of way, if she could. Perhaps her intention was more transparent than she suspected, for her young lodger said, after a while,—

"Suppose you sit down, Mrs. Bonner, and talk to me, and tell me all about the history of this great old house of yours, and keep me company for awhile, if you have nothing to do!"

And Mrs. Bonner, nothing loth, seated herself at a respectful distance without any pressing, and declared that it was but little she knew about the Grange Farm, except that it was main and old, and had been in Bonner's family for many a year.

Some did say it had been a great place in its day, and then, beyond the piggeries there were traces of great terrace and broken steps, and the stables were carved, and made out in rare, fine style, and the big kitchen had been, people said, the great hall; and once, hundreds of years ago, the place was besieged in time of war, and a lot of people shot and piked upon the stairs—Round-heads—and she forgot the name of the others.

"The Cavaliers!" suggested her companion. "This looks like a good old cavalier family mansion, and I am certain that they defended it from cellar to roof! Are there any ghosts?"

"Ghosts!—Heaven save us! What put them in your head?"

"Oh, only the fitness of things. There ought to be ghosts in this good old house. It would not be right otherwise! I'm not a bit afraid of them, so you may tell me the worst without hesitation."

"Not afraid of them!—then you're the only person I have heard say the like," said Mrs. Bonner, surveying her with wide-eyed incredulity. "As for me, the very thought of them makes me shake all over like a shape of jelly! I've seen one," she added in a mysterious whisper, not wholly devoid of triumph.

"Seen one! Oh, Mrs. Bonner, then tell me at once all about it. What a lucky woman you were!"

"I did not think myself over and above lucky at the time," said Mrs. Bonner, grimly. "I wished myself anywhere else, I can tell you!"

"Now, do begin and tell me all about it, for I'm dying to hear a real ghost story from the lips of a person who has actually seen the ghost herself! Come—go on," and thus encouraged, Mrs. Bonner hitched her chair a little nearer, cleared her throat two or three times, and began to relate her crack story—a story which everyone in the village had already heard at least a dozen times:—

"You must know, ma'am," she said, "that when I was a young girl I was nurse in a grand family in the West of England—the Tregarvens of Tregarven Place—and a mighty old grand place it was! If you were to see that, you would not think the Grange anyway out of the common. Such big stairs and little rooms and narrow passages, and cellars going underneath to the sea—it beat everything! It was as lonely as lonely could be; standing in a big, rambling park, sloping down to the seashore, with all sorts of bays and creeks running into it. It had a desperate bad name for ghosts, and no servant in that side of the country would stay in it for gold untold, so that is how a stranger like me came to be there. But I got rare good wages, and I had a stout heart, being as you are now yourself, and Bonner, he was there too, as kind of Bailiff under the head man. His father and mother were living in those days. Well, to make a long story short, as the saying is, Mr. Tregarven was a widower, with one little boy, whom I minded, and two grown-up young ladies, of about eighteen and nineteen. Sweetly pretty they was, as ever you saw, Miss Rose and Miss Mabel; just home from school—finished, as they call it. The master was away at the time I am talking of, and there was only the ladies and little Arthur at the house, and me and the other servants, not so many of them as there might have been—not for the want of plenty of wages and advertisements, but a lot had just cleared out in a body saying they would lose their

money and discharges and everything, but they couldn't put up with the White Lady any longer."

"The White Lady! Was that what they called it?" said Eleanor, stirring up the fire into a fine, cheerful blaze.

"Aye, it was. At some times she was worse, and walked more than others. Dark winter and autumn nights she walked constant, and no one dared to go about the house alone; but in the light, bright weather there was never no sign of her to be seen."

"And what was she like when she was seen?"

"She was very tall, nearly six feet high, and wore a large curled wig, and a lot of hair over her head and down her back; she carried a fan before her face, and all you ever saw of that was a pair of wicked black eyes. She wore a kind of hoop, a white satin dress over a grand flowered petticoat, high-heeled shoes, that went clatter, clatter, clatter, up and down the stairs, and in her other hand she carried a pack of cards." Here, worthy Mrs. Bonner paused to take breath. "Often and often had she been seen at corners of passages, or met full face on the stairs by the housemaids, going up into the rooms."

"And no one ever caught her!" cried Lady Ravenhill, with arched eyebrows.

"Caught her! Bless you they couldn't get away from her near fast enough. They ran like Indians in the other direction; and the house had now got such a desperate bad character that Mr. Tregarven was talking quite openly of shutting it up, letting the land, and going to live elsewhere. The young ladies liked the place and were loth to leave it, and were for staying on at any price; though there was this to be said, they had never seen her, though Miss Mab was always roving about alone, after dark, as bold as any *two* lions."

"Just at this time, Mrs. Tewson, the house-keeper, took her niece to mind Master Arthur, and I was promoted to be maid to the young ladies, being smart and handy, and their own having gone off after a terrible fit of screaming hysterics. She had seen her, and soon I was to do the same."

"I was standing one evening between light and dark in Miss Mab's room, the door wide open, and she with her back to it before the glass, and was just walking over to shut the door, with a dress hanging over my arm, when I heard a great pitter, pitter, patter coming along the corridor, and in another moment she was standing in the doorway, just as they described."

"I saw her as plain as I see you now—tall, with the cards, and fan, and black eyes."

"She stood for a full minute and gazed at me, and then she passed on, and left no feeling as if I would fall in a faint on the floor."

"Miss Mab turned round sharp, but she saw nothing, but she heard the footstep as plain as I did, and I just made the spring to the door and barred it as if she were still outside."

"I was so frightened I hardly dared creep down stairs, even with Miss Mab walking beside me, and laughing at me as a poor silly goose."

"I did not get over this fright for a good while, but Miss Mab was so brave, and said that she would give anything to see the White Lady that she made me brave too, in a kind of way; and she had her wish, for she and I were going upstairs a few evenings afterwards together, just before dinner—I was carrying up a lot of poor clothing, we had been hard at work in the afternoon—when lo and behold! at a turn of the landing we came straight face to face with the Lady."

"There she stood, so close to us I saw her diamonds glitter in the light, and her eyes flash like fire."

"No wonder people were afraid of her, and said she was the wicked Lady Joan, who spent all her nights at cards, and staked her soul with Satan and lost."

"Miss Mab gave a kind of little start, but she neither shrieked nor ran away. She did what no one had ever been known to do before—she faced her, with her head in the air, and said 'Woman or Demon, let me pass!'"

"She did, indeed, for the figure was standing right in the middle of the stairs, and it moved a bit to one side, and she walked up past it, and I—I dare not but follow her for shame, though

the sweat stood out in beads on my forehead, and my knees were knocking together so as I could scarcely stagger upstairs, but I did make a bold rush and got up on the landing and dashed after my lady into the room.

"Shut the door, Wood,"—that was my maiden name—she said, "and come here, I have something to tell you."

"I need not remark that I slammed the door and locked it pretty smart."

"Listen to me, Emma Wood," she says, nodding her head and speaking under her breath. "That what we met on the stairs just now!"

"Lor, miss, wasn't it terrific!" says I. "I feel like fainting!"

"You feel like nothing of the sort, Wood. It was no more a ghost than you are! It was a human being!"

"Gracious powers, Miss Mab! how can you say so?"

"I saw its eyes; they were living eyes! I heard it breathe. It smelt of onions. Its hands were red, and coarse, and enormous—not like the hands of any lady. Lady Joan in her picture has tiny, wee, white hands, and that woman's on the stairs were like a leg of mutton. I'm the only person who has ever been close to her I suppose, and not fainted, and it's my opinion that she has her own reasons for haunting the house, and driving us out of it."

"And what reasons could there be?"

"I have an idea, but I won't say at present, my good Emma; but I'm sure we shall see more of the White Woman before long. She'll come back and try and frighten me in earnest."

"And Miss Mab was right. Two nights later and a pitch dark night it was—she and Miss Rose were sitting up very late playing cards in a queer little three-cornered oak room just out of the big hall. It was late—about eleven—and I was main sleepy; and as a kind of hint that it were nigh on bedtime, I carried in their candles, and as I did that Miss Rose looked round, and said,—

"We'll be ready in a moment, Emma; we've only to finish this round." They were playing dummy whist, drawn up at a little old card-table by the fire.

"The words were hardly out of her mouth than there was the White Lady in the middle of us, as if she had burst out of the wall. I turned cold all over when she spoke, in a kind of queer, deep, foreign accent, and said, 'Will you permit me to take a hand!'"

"Miss Rosie jumped up as if she had been shot, but Miss Mab was certainly a desperately brave young lady. She made a grab at the figure, but in one moment the candles were blown out, the table upset, and she was gone through the wall just as she had come."

"It took us some time to get over this, I can tell you!—meaning me and Miss Tregarven. Miss Mab, quite cool, lit the candles, picked up the table and cards, and then began going round the room with a light in her hand, examining the wainscot, all oak and in panels, knocking and feeling with her hands."

"I have it!" she called out. "Here is a find! Look here!" and sure enough she held up a tiny bit of white that she found sticking out of a crevice. "There's a piece of her petticoat," she said, quite triumphant like, "and there's the secret door. We must find a way to open it to-morrow. Say nothing about it to anyone; and now come to bed."

"Next morning quite early she was down and spent near two hours fingering and feeling for the spring, and she found it. It were about eight o'clock, and dusky still, when the bit of wall like slid by, and there was a stone stair leading somewhere."

"Will you believe it, down went Miss Mab, and I after her, as in duty bound, with my heart in my mouth, stealing down, till we came to a great, cold vault place, like a chapel, no one knew of, under the house. It was as full of casks and bales as any custom house, which surprised me a good bit."

"From that we stole into another place the same, and it was now getting quite light, through long slits of windows, and we crept in among the bales, like two mice, and we saw off this big place

a lot of little rooms, and in one we looked in, and there we saw a bed, a chair, a table, a grand carved glass, and in front of a big curly wig a pot of white paint, a fan, and hanging on the wall the White Lady's petticoat and dress, and mighty grimy they looked in the morning light."

"I then felt no more fear, and was nearly as bold as Miss Mab herself. And we stole on still, behind walls, till we were brought up by the sound of voices—loud, coarse, men's voices—and saw a great stream of light and a lot of people close by in another room, where a great fire was roaring up the chimney, and in front of it was a black-looking old woman with a red handkerchief over her head and a pipe in her mouth; another younger, a bold-looking girl, with great, gold earrings, and about four or five men. They had a case for a table, and on it were bottles, and sausages, and bread, and plenty of glasses."

"The men had tawny faces, some of them, and earrings; and there were one or two men from the village—fishermen supposed to be, but I saw now smugglers—and it was great bravery for smugglers to come into Mr. Tregarven's own house, for he was always on the watch for them and helping the coastguards, he hated 'em so; and people said there was more smuggling and more goods run just somewhere about that part of the coast than in all the rest of England together. There were such fine caves and bays, and the ghostly funerals people said they saw in the park, sometime six coffins and bearers, were all just so many boxes of lace, and silk, and brandy."

"We cowered down, I can tell you, almost fearing the very beating of our own hearts, and could hear every word they said. They were glorying in some great run they had made, and laughing and drinking—oh! drinking a deal—women and all."

"There will be a big cargo to-night," says one. "Now's our time, when the old boy's away. The Jeannette will be off the point at nine to-night, and she's loaded to the watermark with the best cognac and cigars; be rare chance we have this time."

"How did your little game do last night?" said one of the sailors to a black-eyed man in his shirt sleeves turned up, and his bare arms all tattooed.

"Oh, pretty middling, as you call it. Dat young one with the blonde hair, she fear nothing. She face me on the stairs, she face me last night. She is the belle, and the maid was *Pas mal*! I wish we had dem down here now," laughing, and showing a mouthful of white teeth, "would not I kiss them, *l'une et l'autre*. I like to see brave girls—brave, and pretty, and young."

"Hold your silly tongue!" said the old woman, shrilly. "You and your nonsense will be getting us all into trouble. You must give that girl a rare good scare, or she'll be smelling a rat!"

"And suppose she *did*, and made out our little game?"

"It would be worse for her if she *did*," said a big man, fiercely. "I'd got you to decoy her down here, strangle her with these very two hands, and fling her into the old well. We've too much at stake to stand at a trifle. They would say up above that she was lost, and there would be an end of her," he concluded, with an oath.

"At this brutal speech even Miss Mab shivered, and we crept close together—so close that I could hear the thumping of her heart, and every footstep that came near us we thought we were discovered; and when a dog came sniffing I broke out into a cold sweat all over. He found us, too; but, as Mercy had it, he was a village dog who knew Miss Mab—a long, ugly, lurching brute—and he only smelt her, stared at her, wagged his tail, and went away. I suppose he thought she was a smuggler too. In the end, they all went out, or into their stores. We crept off, and up into the house again, more dead than alive, and covered with cobwebs, and mould, and dust. Miss Mab sent for the coastguard, telegraphed for her papa, and the whole gang were caught that very same night. It was a great triumph for my young ady, and even I got some praise. The

goods were sent off, the vaults shut up, the White Lady's clothes exposed to all believers in her, and the house was like any other from that time forward."

"And what became of Miss Mab?" asked Lady Ravenhill.

"Oh! she married an officer—she was just cut out for a soldier herself—and went off to India. And I married, and Mr. Tregarven made me a present of one hundred sovereigns on my wedding-day, and Miss Rosie and Miss Mab gave me my silver teapot and ewer and spoons, the very one you had this evening; and now I've talked you weary and myself hoarse, and I must be going, my lady. I declare there's nix striking!" starting up with horror.

"You deserved all you got, Mrs. Bonner, and I have been greatly interested in your story, and I am very much obliged to you for so kindly entertaining me. You have made the long evening seem nothing," said her lodger.

"I can tell you something else, my lady, if I may make so bold. Your husband is better; he's got his senses quite clear at last, and he's been asking for you. If I were a wife I would see that woman further before I'd let her stand sentry between me and my husband. I'd just open the door as I do this one, and walk in. Good-night," and so saying Mrs. Bonner suited the action to the word, flung the door wide, walked out and shut it behind her with an unusual amount of decision, leaving Lady Ravenhill to contemplate the propriety of following her advice.

(To be continued.)

A LOYAL LOVE.

—33—

(Continued from page 225.)

"I'm uncle Frank's little boy," he said doubtfully; "I want to go with my uncle Frank."

It required a great deal of diplomacy to bring him to agree to this fresh arrangement, but finally, on the understanding that "Uncle Frank" would come again soon, he was won over, and Frank took his departure, leaving Adelaide to her new found happiness.

In her delight at this sudden restoration of her sister's fair fame, Adelaide had failed to realise what Dick's advent had cost Ralph, and it was not until she was lying in bed, with Dick's chubby arms clasped around her neck that she fully understood what had occurred.

It was the one flaw in her happiness. Ralph an exile and a wanderer! Ralph homeless, perhaps beggared! The thought maddened her. Could she not prevent it? She was rich. She had far more money than she would ever require, enough for herself and sufficient to compensate Dick for the loss of Oatleigh.

Frank was coming in the morning, she would tell him her design, and he would assist her to carry it out.

Frank laughed when she unfolded her plan, and pointed out its impracticability. "It is another proof—if proof were needed," he said "of your tender heart, but the thing is impossible. You must not think of our friend as a beggar. Of course it will make a great difference to him, but he has his own private fortune, which, though small, is sufficient for him to live upon comfortably. And I do not know that I am altogether sorry for the change; it will give him the motive he has lacked; he has already resumed his painting, and I shall not be surprised if even yet he makes a name for himself in the world of Art."

Had it not been for that one terrible mistake, life would have seemed very pleasant to Adelaide just then. The old haunting sense of shame, which had burdened her existence, had disappeared, and Dick, with his bright blue eyes, Dick, with his sunny smile and loving disposition, became to her every day a greater joy and blessing.

But Frank saw she was not quite happy. Occasionally, the soft brown eyes would moisten with unbidden tears, and once or twice when she

had thought herself alone, he had caught sight of an expression of sadness in the fair face.

What could be the matter? he asked himself. Had it to do with Ralph? Did she really love him after all? But if so, why had she sent him away? To him it was inexplicable.

Meanwhile, his own passion increased in strength, and he felt he must put an end to the suspense which was becoming intolerable.

It was the morning after the production of his most ambitious drama. He ought to have been in the highest spirits, for he had scored an unprecedented success. The theatre had been packed with the representatives of wealth and beauty and talent.

Adelaide had excelled all her previous efforts, and he himself had been treated with a magnificent ovation which had astonished him. He had seen Adelaide only for a few minutes after the performance, but now he determined upon paying her a visit.

He thought she had never looked so beautiful as now, seated in an easy-chair, she smiled down at Dick, who was playing on the rug at her feet.

"Well," she cried joyously at the young man's entrance, "was I not right? did I not prophesy your play would make you famous?" and she pointed to a pile of newspapers on the table.

"I hope all these flattering encomiums will not make you vain."

"The success was yours, rather than mine," he answered gallantly; and then, heedless of the child, who was busy with a new toy which Frank had brought for him, he said earnestly—

"Miss Travers, Adelaide, I can keep silence no longer; have you never guessed what my life has been for the last few months? Adelaide, you cannot be ignorant that I love you; that my one great hope has been to make you my wife. My darling, I must speak, I cannot plead in tender language, but let my love plead for me. Give me an answer, dear; tell me that my love is not in vain. I have been very patient, but this very success of which you have spoken, has shown me the hollow mockery of wealth, of reputation and honour, unless it be shared with you. Adelaide, be merciful, for in refusing me your love you will be taking all the sunshine out of my life."

She looked at him so sorrowfully, Oh! so sorrowfully, and her voice was low and tremulous.

"My dear friend," she said, "my kind, true-hearted friend, what am I to say to you? This is a bitter grief to me. How can I repay all your tender care, all your kindness and loving sympathy, with apparent ingratitude? And yet I must! Frank, do not despise me. I am not insensible of your love, and you are very dear to me, but not in that way. Oh! Frank, it nearly breaks my heart to see you so unhappy; but indeed, indeed, I cannot marry you. It would be cruel and unjust, for I do not love you like that;" and she burst into tears.

"Let me hope, Adelaide," he said despairingly, "in the years to come, when I have proved my devotion, perhaps my great love may yet win you."

She took him by the hand, and the truthful brown eyes looked steadily into his.

"Frank," she said, "my present cruelty is the best kindness. I love you now as I should a darling brother; the other love will never come; do not press me further."

What he saw in her face perhaps he himself scarcely knew then, but it showed him his hope was in vain.

"Heaven bless you, Adelaide!" he murmured, brokenly; "forgive me for the pain I have caused you, I will go now."

He pressed her hand passionately; kissed Dick who had stopped his play in wonder, and passed out with unsteady steps, feeling as if his heart were broken, while Adelaide caught up the boy in her arms and kissed him and wept over him alternately.

CHAPTER IX.

THE one black day in Frank Gardiner's life was the one on which Adelaide refused to become his wife. Unlike his friend he had not been very sanguine of success, but it was not until he had

actually failed that he realised what this death-blow to his hopes meant.

Even when he left Gloucester Terrace he did not know the depth of his pain. He was conscious only of a dull, heavy aching, as if he had been partially stunned by a physical blow.

His landlady looked at him with curiosity mixed with pity as he passed her on his way to his room.

"Poor young fellow!" she muttered, "he has had some nasty news, I'll warrant; he looks just like a ghost! Well, whatever it is, I'm sure I'm sorry, for a nicer young gentleman never lived."

Indeed poor Frank stood in need of pity. His love for Adelaide was not a passing mood, not a boyish fancy founded on a beautiful face and a woman's smile, it was the loyal whole-hearted love of a true man. His affection for Adelaide was a part of his being; it stirred his every nerve, it was woven with the very blood that coursed through his veins. Unconsciously she had become a part of himself, and to take away his love would have been like despoiling him of the air he breathed.

It was indeed the fervour and the purity of his passion that saved him now from utter ruin. Unavailingly at first, the idea tried to force its way into the poor dazed brain, but at length like a ray of light in the darkness it shone upon him and grew clearer and more perfect.

He had told Adelaide that he loved her, and he would do his best to make her happy, seeking his own happiness in the reflection of her joy. In the abandonment of his own bitter grief he had forgotten his discovery of the morning; now it came back to him with a vivid force and directness that assured him of its truth. She could not marry him because her heart had passed from her keeping.

He did not attempt to argue the matter; the fact was patent to him as the shining of the sun at noonday; her love had been bestowed upon another, and that other was Somerset. Why she had sent him away he did not know, he did not even pause to consider, but that she loved him he felt certain.

He rose and lit the gas. He had Ralph's address, he would write to him. Like the brave, loving man he was, he pushed back the weight of his own misery in the endeavour to secure the happiness of the woman for whom he would willingly have sacrificed his life.

"Dear Ralph," he wrote, "once before I had a communication to make to you which spoiled your life and drove you an exile from your country. To-day I am going to make amends. You know full well, though I have never confessed it to you in actual words, that I love Miss Travers. This morning I asked her to be my wife and she declined. Can you guess why? I will tell you; she loves you. Of what has passed between you two I am of course ignorant, but whatever it may have been it has not lessened her affection, of that I am sure. She looks wretchedly ill. If you would have the roses restored to her cheeks and the radiance to her eyes, come back at once. Ever your friend, and once your rival.—FRANK."

Tears of pity welled up in Ralph Somerset's eyes as he sat some few days later in his studio, perusing his friend's letter.

"Poor old Frank!" he murmured softly, "what a gallant, unselfish fellow he is; he makes me ashamed of myself."

He sat pondering a long time. What ought he to do? Did Adelaide really love him? The thought sent the blood coursing faster through his veins and brought a vivid colour to his cheeks. And Frank was not likely to have been mistaken. Still circumstances had altered materially since that memorable day. Then he was a rich man, now he was comparatively poor.

But he could work, he had the ability, and with Adelaide's comfort as an incentive, there could be no question of failure. Yes, he would go; he would pack his things that very day, and once more put his resolution to the test.

Now that his resolution was formed every minute of delay seemed an age, and he burned with impatience for the moment when he should

once again stand on English ground. He would not call on Frank, he would go straight to Adelaide and renew his offer.

It was already afternoon when he reached Gloucester-terrace and sent in his name. Mrs. Porter had taken Dick for a walk and Adelaide was alone.

How his heart beat as he entered the well-known room! His throat seemed parched, and for a few moments he stood unable to speak.

Adelaide on her part was deathly pale. She stood resting one arm for support on the back of her chair and trembling in every limb.

But she recovered her self-possession before Ralph.

"Mr. Somerset!" she exclaimed, gently, "I thought you were in Italy."

The sound of her voice restored him to his senses, and he crossed the room.

"Adelaide," he said, "Adelaide, does not your heart tell you why I have come back? My beloved, will you send me away again without one word of comfort? My darling, can you not forgive the wretched, miserable past? Adelaide, look into your heart and tell me that my hope is not baseless, that you have for me just one tiny spark of love."

"Surely," she answered, "you are reversing our positions; it is I who should sue for forgiveness for my wild, wicked words, and the base thoughts in my heart."

She would have said more, but he checked her gently.

"Adelaide," he whispered, "Can we not put all that away from us? Why need we trouble ourselves about the past; let the dead bury its dead. I love you, Adelaide, will you be my wife? I am not a rich man now, but I can keep you in comfort, and perhaps some day I may gain a name that even you may not be ashamed to bear."

The beautiful brown eyes glowed with a wondrous light, as she murmured, shyly,—

"I think I have always loved you, Ralph, but I feel that I am not worthy of your affection."

For answer he took her in his arms and kissed her passionately.

"My darling!" he cried, "not another word; for us the past has no existence, we will begin our lives from to-day."

She laid her beautiful head upon his shoulder, and thus they sat, silent, with the silence of a perfect bliss.

Ralph stayed a week in England, and during that time the lovers made all their arrangements. It was decided that he should return to Italy to study hard for the next twelve months, and at the end of that time they would be married.

"I do not care for money, dear," Adelaide said, "I have enough for both; but I would wish my husband to make a name for himself," and he assented smilingly, as he would have done to any suggestion she had chosen to make.

The night before leaving England Ralph went to his friend's house. It was a pathetic meeting between the two men, but Frank bore himself bravely, and let no sign escape him of the agony he suffered.

"Let me congratulate you, old friend," he said, when Ralph told him of what had happened; "that she has accepted you takes away half my own pain, for I know you are worthy of her."

They did not say much for the heart of each was too full for words, but several times that night Ralph found himself wondering whether if rewards went by merit he or Frank would be the happier man, a question which neither he nor Adelaide could satisfactorily have answered.

During the year which followed Ralph worked hard in his profession, and not without considerable results; for the vision of Adelaide was ever before him, stimulating his ambition and nerving his arm, so that even before his marriage he gave ample proof of the correctness of Frank's judgment.

Many years have elapsed since the commencement of our story, bringing their inevitable changes in their train. Dick Somerset the owner of Oatleigh is fast following in the footsteps of his uncle Ralph, whose name is a household word wherever lovers of English art congregate.

George Irvine has long since flourished the great majority, but his theatre still flourishes under the able management of his successor, and there one night had gathered a brilliant and fashionable assembly to witness the latest production of one of the most talented dramatists of the nineteenth century.

Several times during the evening the applause is almost deafening in its intensity, and when at length the curtain falls for the last time the whole house breaks into one uproarious cry of "Author, author."

See there he is, that tall handsome man with pale refined features and a certain suspicion of sadness in his noble-looking face. Hush! he is going to speak to thank them for their kind reception of himself and his play.

If you look closely, you will see that his gaze lingers longest on the occupants of one of the private boxes. Following his direction you will observe a group of four; a tall man slightly older than the dramatist, with broad shoulders and frank open face; a magnificently beautiful woman who appears still to be in the prime of life; a younger man in the first blush of manhood, and a lovely girl with nut brown hair, and large, soft brown eyes, evidently the daughter of the lady on whose shoulder her head is resting.

On all their faces there is a proud, happy, smile, for they are Ralph Somerset, his wife and daughter, and their nephew, Dick, and the man at whose triumph they are assisting, is their dearest friend, Frank Gardiner.

His love for Adelaide has survived the test of all these long years and it will go down with him into his grave. Not that his life is an unhappy one! He does not regret, has never regretted the letter which fetched Ralph from Italy, for each succeeding year has made it more plain that Adelaide's happiness was centred in Ralph.

Besides, there are many things to brighten his life. He has succeeded in his profession, beyond his wildest hopes; fame and fortune alike are his, and that which he prizes above all else—the loyal friendship of Adelaide and her husband. To their children he is "Uncle Frank" whom they love and admire, and Oatleigh Grange never receives a more welcome or more honoured visitor.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

MODERN POET: "Give me a rhyme for *In-Quenza*." Friend: "What are you writing?" Modern Poet: "An ode to spring."

"This chintz speaks for itself, madam," said the clerk to a customer. "Yes," was the reply, "but I don't want anything quite so loud."

YOUNG MISTRESS: "Patrick, you haven't given fresh water to the gold-fish." Patrick: "No, miss; they ain't drunk wot they had already."

"Do you ever suffer from insomnia?" "No; whenever I can't sleep I just imagine that it's eight o'clock in the morning, and that I have been called twice."

He: "Is that your school friend? Why, she isn't so very ugly." She: "Ugly! Who said she was?" He: "You said all the girls loved her."

POLICE SERGEANT: "Are you all ready for the raid on that gambling establishment?" Constable: "Yes. Notified the proprietor yesterday."

BLOBS (who had made an impression): "What a breezy young girl Miss Dobbie is." Slobbs (who has been rejected): "Yes; so chilly and cool, don't you know."

"You call yourself a mind-reader?" "Yes." "Well, then, I challenge you to read mine." "I am not a worker of miracles; I cannot decipher what does not exist."

WILKINS: "The fact is, doctor, my wife does not walk enough. She can never be persuaded to go out without an object." Doctor: "Then why do you not make a point of going out with her yourself?"

"Just think; six of my patients recovered this week." The Old Doctor: "It's your own fault, my boy. You spend too much time at the club."

MAMMA (sternly): "Don't you know that the great King Solomon said: 'Spare the rod and spoil the child'?" Bobby: "Yes, but he didn't say that until he was grown up."

WILLIS: "That young man who plays the cornet is ill." Wallace: "Do you think he will recover?" "I am afraid not. The doctor who is attending him lives next door."

FIRST DOCTOR: "I hear, old fellow, that you treated my neighbour for typhus. Was it a bad case?" Second Ditto: "A very bad case, the man didn't pay his bill."

"Did you have a long run with your play?" "I should say so," replied the author-actor. "A mile and a half with an infuriated audience on our heels every step of the way."

GROOM: "Dese yer papers neber git things right." Bride: "How so?" "Why it says we were married at Hymen's altar—and it was at ole Pehson Johnson's, that's how."

A WEST END RECEPTION.—He: "Who is he?" She: "O, he is a lion. He has written a book." "And who is the girl he is talking to?" (Viciously.) "She's an old cat. She has written a book."

FATHER: "Yes, I admit that your lover has a good income, but he has very expensive tastes, very." Daughter: "You amaze me. What does he ever want that is so very expensive?" Father: "Well, you, for one thing."

"Why has Lucy gone home so early? I thought she was to stay all day," said mamma. "Well, mamma," said Mary, confidentially, "I just found she wasn't a friend I could quarrel with."

MOTHER: "Walter, see that you give Beatrice the lion's share of that banana." Walter: "Yes, mamma." Beatrice: "Mamma, Walter hasn't given me any." Walter: "Well, that's all right. Lions don't eat bananas."

MAMMA: "But, Ethel, how do you know that this young man loves you? Has he told you so?" Ethel: "Oh, no, mamma. But if you could only see the way he looks at me when I am not looking at him!"

BRIDE (exchanging bridal costume for travelling dress): "Did I appear nervous at all during the ceremony, Clara?" Bridesmaid (evidently): "A little at first, dear; but not after George had said 'Yes.'"

TRAMP: "Please, mum, d'yeh wanten buy anything in my line." Housekeeper: "Your line, eh? You don't mean to say you are trying to earn an honest living at last?" "Yes'm." "Well, I declare! What are you selling?" "Dog-chains, mum."

A YOUNG fellow having been asked by one of the recruiting sergeants who haunt the precincts of the National Gallery whether he wanted to enlist in a Scottish regiment, replied,—Not I, I'd rather go into a lunatic asylum than enlist in a Highland regiment." "Well," said the sergeant, "I've nae doubt ye'd feel mair at home there."

TOURIST (in America): "That was a terrible fight between those two desperadoes—both of them killed." Col. Clay (of Texas): "Big Tom Smith and Bad Jake Wiggins! Yes, but it was a great blow to the community." Tourist: "Blow! Why, I thought they were two of the most worthless scoundrels in the south!" Col. Clay (regretfully): "Yes; but don't you see, they wer' both killed. There was nobody to lynch!"

THAT wary old Fellow, Bailie Maeduff, was enticed into a friend's house the other night, and his host managed to win 50s. from him at "nap." What is more remarkable, the Bailie had the money on him, and paid. When the Bailie had parted with his last shilling, he rose, full of wrath. "Won't you stay to supper!" pressed his host, "we've a fine piece of ham waiting." "Wait for supper!" yelled the magistrate. "By heavens, no! Dae ye think I can eat fifty shillingworth of ham?"

"WERE you ever arrested before?" asked the magistrate. Wandering William (the tramp) held his hat before his face and looked sidewise at the Court. "Did ye mean that question, yer washup?" he asked. "Why, certainly I mean it." "Sure!" "Stop your trifling, and answer me." "Scuse me, yer washup, but I can't git over yer taking this for my first appearance. Hones, now, do I look like er beginner?"

FIREMAN (at the window): "You'll have to hurry, mites. The roof's almost ready to fall in." Boston Girl—"In just a minute. There's a volume of Ibsen I can't find, and—" "A minute? You haven't half that much time—" "That much is a colloquialism, sir, for which there is no good authority whatever. The word 'that' is never an adverb. You should say 'so much,' or 'thus much,' or 'as much as that,' but not—" Is dragged out just in time.

Two countrymen stood staring at a fashionable hatter's window, contemplating with mingled surprise and admiration a newly patented hat, in the inside of which a small mirror was carefully concealed. "I wonder, now, what is the use of that looking glass inside that hat!" at length exclaimed one of them. "Well, you must be a stoopid!" replied his companion, with a supercilious air; "why, so that whoever buys the hat may see if it suits him, of course!"

THE long-haired caller in the editorial room was indignant. "Poets are born, sir," he said to the eminently practical editor. "Of course they are," responded the editor, suavely, "you didn't imagine I thought they were batched, do you?" "I mean, sir, they are born; born, sir, do you understand?" "I think I do," and the editor rubbed his chin reflectively, "but why are they?" That was the straw that fractured the spinal column of the camel, and the poet stalked out of the den.

A GENTLEMAN was showing a cabby over a museum, and, showing him a coin, he informed him that it was over two thousand years old. Cabby evidently did not believe him, but said nothing at the time, and went through the other departments lost in thought. On leaving the building he said to his guide, "I say, guv'nor, I knew you were 'avin' me over that there coin." "No; what makes you think that?" replied his informant. "Didn't you tell me the coin was two thousand years old?" "I did." "Well, it's only 1894 now."

THE moon was just rising from a bank of dense clouds as the burglar reached through the hole he had made in the back door and raised the latch. He had scarcely crossed the threshold when he started violently. "Aha!" he muttered. It was not so much his words as his manner. For an instant his eyes rested hungrily upon the glittering silverware. Then his glance wandered to the plumbers' tools that were scattered about the floor. "No," he muttered. "This is another man's job, and I don't take the bread out of his mouth." Retracing his steps, he was soon lost to view.

HER lips quivered, and her breath came in laboured gasps, but she did not speak. "Do you love me?" he anxiously demanded, seizing her shrinking hand. "I—I don't know," she faltered. Gently he insinuated his arm about her. "Darling," he murmured, "would you like to have me ask your mamma first?" With a sudden cry of terror she grasped his arm. "No, no, no!" she shrieked, convulsively. "She is a widow. I want you myself." She clung to him until he solemnly promised that he would say nothing to the old lady for the present.

In a small Berkshire town there lived a retired naval officer, who possessed the odious habit of asking people all sorts of inquisitive questions. One day when out for a stroll he met an eccentric old character named Duncan, and the following colloquy took place: "Well, Duncan, you're dressed bravely to-day; where are you going?" "Jist to the castle, captain," proudly replied Duncan, as he touched his cap by way of salutation. "And what have you got in that basket?" further queried the captain. "Faith, sir, I had na the impudence to ask," coolly returned Duncan.

SOCIETY.

HER Majesty has now got some two-thirds of her birthday presents in her possession, the value of which during the last seventy-five years would be a good fortune for any Prince of the Blood.

THE Duke of Parma, father of the Princess of Bulgaria, is the prince who can boast of the most children among the princes of Europe. He has fifteen, viz., ten daughters and five sons, all of whom are living.

THE Princess of Wales has consented to open the New House for Incurables at Streatham on the afternoon of July 2nd next, on which occasion her Royal Highness will be accompanied by the Prince of Wales, and, it is hoped, by other members of the Royal Family.

THE gift of the King and Queen of the Belgians to their niece, the Princess Josephine, who was married lately, consists of a diamond brooch and bracelet, together with a ten-pointed tiara of diamonds containing eleven Persian turquoises of enormous size and great value.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales have expressed their intention of being present on Speech Day at Harrow School. This kind thoughtfulness on their Royal Highnesses' part has given the greatest pleasure, and the date of the Speech Day has been altered from July the 5th to July the 7th to suit their Royal Highnesses' convenience.

THE Queen has placed Osborne Cottage at the disposal of the Duke and Duchess of York when they leave Richmond, so, all being well, they will proceed to the Isle of Wight towards the end of July for a stay of about three weeks, and then to Sandringham for a short time before going to Scotland.

THE Royal yacht *Alberta* is being fitted with new boilers at Portsmouth, and she is to be ready for service by the end of the month in order that she may be available for use during the Queen's summer residence at Osborne. The *Alberta's* service is now strictly limited to the Solent. Extensive dryrot in her upper works has been discovered during her present refit, so it is quite as well that she never goes far now.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS CHRISTIAN will entertain a large party at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park, during Ascot race week, after which they are going to Germany to attend the wedding of the Hereditary Prince of Leiningen and Princess Feodora of Hohenlohe-Langenburg. The bride and bridegroom are both great grandchildren of the Duchess of Kent by her first marriage with Emich, Prince of Leiningen.

THE Duke of York has been invested by Maria Christina with the Order of the Golden Fleece. The Order is a high and an old one; and H.R.H. may well be proud to include it among his many decorations. It ranks with the English Garter, the Prussian Black Eagle, the Italian Order of the Annunciation, and the Russian Order of St. Andrew. The man who can display all these on grand occasions must necessarily be a Royalty of the first rank, on the high road to a throne, if not already seated on one.

THE Emperor of Germany drinks nothing but Mexican coffee, and a year's supply is sent to him regularly after each harvest from a plantation in the State of Michoacan. That intended for the use of the Emperor's personal household is known as the Caracollo, carefully selected and sent to him in bags made of silk, while that for the Court goes in the ordinary gunny sacks. Coffee is at its best when three or four years old, and as the supply from each harvest is received it is put aside to ripen in the Emperor's garret.

THE German Emperor has given his sanction to the plan for erecting the national monument to Bismarck—for which nearly a million and a half marks have been subscribed—on the Königplatz, between the Victory Column and the main entrance to the new Imperial House of Parliament, which is to be opened by his Majesty in presence of all his fellow Sovereigns in Germany, on October 18th next.

STATISTICS.

ONE THIRD of the earth is controlled by the Anglo-Saxon race.

IT is said that there never is an odd number of rows on an ear of corn.

WILLIAM is the Christian name that has belonged to the greatest number of distinguished persons.

CINCHONA, from which we get quinine, is one of the most important exports of Ceylon, over £400,000 worth being sent out every year.

IT is reckoned that in England 5,071,000 copies of books are published in one year, and sold for £760,650, an average of three shillings a copy.

GEMS.

IT is better to fail in trying to do good than not to try.

TO reach the regions of light you must pass through the clouds; some stop there, others know how to go beyond.

FALSE happiness is like false money—it passes for a time as well as the true; but, when it is brought to the touch, we find the lightness and alloy, and feel the loss.

THE efficacy of good examples in the formation of public opinion is incalculable. Though men justify their conduct by reasons, and sometimes bring the very rules of virtue to the touchstone of abstraction, yet they principally act from example.

NONE would desire to inspire another with selfishness, or malice, or ill-nature, or revenge, or any evil passion. Yet if we possess and retain such characteristics in ourselves, no effort of our own will can prevent us from infusing them into those with whom we mingle.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SALMON AND TOAST.—Season one cup of canned salmon with pepper and salt, and heat in a little milk or cream. Heat more milk in a shallow basin, and dip in it the slices of toasted bread; place these in a hot dish, spread with butter, and pour the fish and cream over it.

PRUNE JELLY.—Wash, cover with cold water, and soak overnight one pound of prunes. Next morning bring them quickly to the boiling point, and press through a colander. There should be at least a pint and a half of this pulp after straining. Soak a half box of gelatine in half a cup of cold water one half hour; put the prune pulp on the range, add a cup of sugar, and the juice of a lemon; stir in the gelatine, and when the whole begins to melt turn into a mold. Serve cold with cream, plain or whipped.

RHUBARB WINE.—Take twenty-five pounds of rhubarb, wipe it with a damp cloth, cut it up and bruise it well; put it in a tub with five gallons of cold water, let it remain nine days, stirring two or three times a day; strain off the liquor, and to each gallon put three pounds loaf sugar, and juice and rind of a small lemon; put it in a cask or jar with one ounce of isinglass, and leave it without the bung for a month; then bung it up and leave in a cool, but not damp, place for twelve months; then bottle.

CHOCOLATE.—Take dozen of chocolate, place it in an enamelled pan with half a gill of water; set it near the fire to dissolve slowly. When all is dissolved, add to it one pint of milk, and bring it gradually to the boil, and it is ready. The chocolate is sometimes whisked as it comes to the boil, to froth it, but it is better if a French pan with an opening in the lid to put the whisk through. If you want frothed cream, just whip common cream till it is frothy, and put a little in the cup. Cocoa and chocolate should always be boiled.

MISCELLANEOUS.

IN the Western Pacific Ocean are several islands that appear and disappear at irregular intervals. They come up suddenly to warm their brows in the sunshine, and then, after a few days or weeks, as suddenly disappear.

WOMEN are not much esteemed by the Algerian Arabs. When a child is born, if it is a boy, the women folk shout two or three times in the street with all their might; but if it is a girl, they shout only once.

THE most valuable frame ever made for a picture is that which encloses the "Virgin and Child," in Milan Cathedral. Its size is eight feet by six feet, the frame is of massive hammered gold, with an inner moulding of lapis lazuli; the corners have hearts designed in large pearls, and precious stones are inlaid around it. It is said to have been the gift of a rich nunnery, and its estimated value is £25,000.

THE most prominent national custom among the Burmese is smoking. Every man, woman, and child, from the King downwards, smokes immense cheroots four or five inches long, made of a coarse leaf rolled up and filled with wood chips, raw sugar, and a dash of tobacco according to taste. One of these cheroots once lit frequently passes round the entire family circle, not forgetting even the smallest members of it.

THE cotton fields of Egypt are artificially watered about eight times during cultivation, generally by taking the Nile water between the ridges on which the plants are growing. The general ripening of the pods begins in September, and the cotton is ready for the first picking in October. The wages of the pickers are from 10d. to 1s. 3d. daily for men, and 7d. for children.

THE earliest form of the horseshoe was a leather boot. But this boot was only worn by heavy war-horses. The ordinary horses of the Greeks, Romans, Arabians, and other natives were unshod, though methods of hardening the hoof were occasionally used. The earliest written record of metal shoes is found in a book by the Emperor Leo VI., who died A.D. 911, but horseshoes have been found in tombs that date back to the sixth century. The earliest Oriental form of shoe was nearly circular, and was fastened on not by nails, but by flanges driven into the side of the hoof. The Arabian farriers even to-day shoe their horses cold, and regard the European method as injurious.

ONE of the marine wonders of the world is the great barrier reef of Australia. This stupendous rampart of coral, stretching in an almost unbroken line for one thousand two hundred and fifty miles along the north-eastern coast of Australia, presents features of interest which are not to be equalled in any other quarter of the globe. Nowhere is the action of the little marine insect, which builds up with untiring industry those mighty mountains with which the tropical seas are studded, more impressive; nowhere are the wonderful constructive forces of nature more apparent. By a simple process of accretion there has been reared in the course of countless centuries an adamant wall against which the billows of the Pacific, sweeping along in an uninterrupted course of several thousand miles, dash the selves in ineffectual fury. Inclosed within the range of its protecting arms is a calm island sea, eighty thousand square miles in extent, dotted with a multitude of coral islets and presenting at every turn objects of interest alike to the unlearned traveller and the man of science. Here may be witnessed the singular process by which the waxy gelatinous living mass hardens into stone, then serves as a collecting ground for the flotsam and jetsam of the ocean, and ultimately develops into an island covered with a luxurious mass of tropical growth. Here, again, may be seen in the serene depths of placid pools extraordinary forms of marine life aglow with the most brilliant colours and producing in their infinite variety a bewildering sense of the vastness of the life of the ocean.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

SQUARE.—Take it to a dealer.
P. S.—Apply to a local expert.
M. S. P.—They can compel you to pay in full.
DAIRY.—The Princess of Wales was born in 1844.
IN DOUBT.—There is no cure for colour-blindness.
ERILLOS.—Easter Sunday in 1835 fell on April 10th.
HUGH.—The word Creole is from the Spanish *criollo*.
R. D.—We fail to catch the purport of your question.
JOHN'S DARLING.—There is no legal obstacle to such a marriage. Ivy leaf signifies friendship.
AN OLD READER.—Cutting the hair is a sign of mourning in Persia.

HARRISSED.—Just apply where you think there is a chance.

ST. VINCENT.—A penny stamp makes a receipt valid for any amount.

W. P. G.—White kid gloves are imperative in your case.

INCURTER.—The husband is not liable in the case stated.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—The battle of Tel-el-Kebir was fought on 13th September, 1882.

L. F.—Her Majesty the Queen is, we believe, just five feet in height.

DERRY.—The usual term of notice from and by a lodger is a week.

AN ADMIRING READER.—On March 7th, 1876, the first patent on the telephone was granted.

A CONSTANT READER.—The best hope of saving it is to rob the whole for half an hour.

E. E.—If a debt is not acknowledged within six years, it is not recoverable.

ANXIOUS READER.—Practice regularly but moderately for another year at least, avoiding all extra efforts.

WORRIED.—Quinine does not affect the eyes and head except when taken in excessive quantity.

FRACAS.—You are bound by the rules of the society, with which we are not acquainted.

N. R.—Your best chance would be to obtain her admission into some almshouse.

Y. S.—The punishment of standing in the pillory was altogether abolished in 1831.

AN OLD SUBSCRIBER.—Madder is a well-known dye stuff, and can be obtained where such are sold.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—You must have a pedlar's or hawkers' licence to carry jewellery about for sale.

BERNARD.—A man is liable to prosecution for trespass, when he does damage, or is malicious.

PATRICK.—The population of Ireland at the last census was 4,704,750, and that of London 1,836,411.

MARY.—Try borax and warm water, sponge afterwards with vinegar and water, and iron on wrong side.

ROSANNA.—Fole rings can be made to run easily by rubbing the pole with kerosene until thoroughly smooth.

GEOFFREY C.—Birmingham is a city; it has no cathedral or bishop, neither of which is necessary to its being a city.

MOTHER'S HELP.—Lamp glasses that have been badly stained by smoke may be cleaned by rubbing with common salt.

L. R. S. P.—The compulsory penny stamp on newspapers was entirely abolished on the 15th of June, 1855.

HOUSEWIFE.—Milk in boiling always forms a peculiar skin, so a pinch of soda should be added when beginning to cook.

REGULAR READER.—Lenses can be perfectly disinfected in hot water, then let get cold. It should be used very weak.

QUAKER.—One plan is to have several wooden "sparrowbills" driven into the soles by a shoemaker; that usually has the desired effect.

ROB AND BEILE.—There must be at least twenty-one days' residence of one of the persons in the parish where the marriage is to take place.

BURTON.—The City of London is in the county of Middlesex; but "greater London" covers parts of Middlesex, Kent, and Surrey.

H. B.—The Duke of Cambridge is described as Field-Marshal the Duke of Cambridge, "commanding-in-chief."

HUNTER.—As you say you can make dresses and hats, this, undoubtedly, will be the most profitable business for you to engage in.

AURICA.—The time necessary to acquire a knowledge of any musical instrument depends on the capacity and diligence of the learner.

INQUISITIVE DAVID.—The bride's veil is a relic of the "care cloth," a canopy held over a virgin bride by our Saxon forefathers to conceal her embarrassment.

FLOO.—There is unquestionably a great deal of good work done by these people, and if your heart is in the matter it may be the best thing for you to do.

T. B.—Unless the letter was registered, and the proper registration insurance fee paid, the Post-Office is not liable for coin that may have been lost in transmission.

DONALD.—No honourable man will prevent other men from paying court to a lady to whom he has no intentions of offering himself. We congratulate you upon getting rid of the dirt referred to.

BARROW.—The Scotch Established Church is Presbyterian. It does not materially differ in Church government or in doctrine from the other Presbyterian bodies—the Free Church and the United Presbyterians.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—There are no known means by which the scars made by smallpox can be removed; but with every fresh removal of the skin they become less conspicuous.

WORRIED FRED.—You should write to the Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, E.W., specifying the colony in your mind, and papers will be sent you containing full information.

GLADYS.—The demand in this country for servant girls of all grades is much in excess of the supply, and no respectable girl, not afraid of work, need be a day out of a good situation.

NELL GWYNNE.—Mix equal parts of ammonia and water, and sponge the stain till it is out. If the colour is at all gone, sponge afterwards with a little vinegar and water.

AN OLD LOVE LETTER.

It lay within my work-box old,
 With dusty time-worn cover,
 I took it up unthinkingly,
 And, musing, turned it over,
 And from the paper's worn old fold
 There fell the little letter
 You sent me as a valentine,
 For want of something better.

I stooped and raised the yellow sheet,
 With careful touch and tender,
 And as I smoothed the crumpled page
 I thought of you, the sender.
 There's half a world between us now,
 The vows we made are broken,
 And yet I held it very dear—
 This little time-worn token.

You could not make me offering such
 As wealthier ones were making,
 And so you offered what to me
 Seemed far more worth the taking;
 The ink is pale and dim with age,
 The lines have faded sadly;
 They do not look like those you wrote,
 And I received so gladly.

"My darling, I am poor indeed,
 I have no gift to send you,
 Save one I scarcely dare to name,
 For fear it should offend you.
 It is not gold from Africa's shore,
 Nor pearl from briny ocean,
 But 'tis the best I have to give—
 A loving heart's devotion."

And so I'll keep the letter old,
 And sometimes read it over,
 And muse upon the days long by,
 When you were first my lover.
 'Tis true I'm more ambitious now,
 Such things would not content me;
 But oh! I never can forget
 The letter that you sent me.

H. C.

G. T.—The first actual communication through an electrical circuit was made in 1787, when Lenoir, a French philosopher, placed two electrical machines in different rooms in his house and connected them by wire.

POPER.—Remove any scratches that may be present with finely-pulverised pumice-stone, moistened with water; then wash the ivory, and polish with prepared chalk, applied moist upon a piece of chamois leather, rubbing quickly.

EQUESTRIENNE.—It is stated that Queen Anne, wife of Richard II., first taught English women to ride on side-saddles, when hitherto they rode astride. As late as 1772 Queen Mariana Victoria of Portugal always rode astride.

X. Y. Z.—It is often the case that such letters are written by dictation and that the author of them has nothing to do with the form. If the subject-matter is all right, there is no occasion for you to take offence or suspect coarseness.

A LOVER OF BIRDS.—Birds sometimes pull out their feathers because they are troubled with mites. Sometimes they have a sort of skin disease. It would be well to have a bird-fancier examine her, as there may be something the matter that does not appear.

ROSE.—Starch powder and bread crumbs is the best thing under the circumstances. You might mix a little powdered blue with the starch, but if you do, put only a slight tint of it and mix thoroughly, or there may be smears; use the stale bread crumb in lumps as rubber.

CH.—If we understand your question correctly, it is that you paid 8s. for some ground for a certain time; then you ought to have an agreement to that effect, or be able to prove your claim to same. On doing this the new tenant cannot compel you to give it up without compensation.

HETTIE.—We fear it cannot be done without injury to the colours. However, for coloured woollen stuffs of any sort we have heard of good results effected by dropping the grease from a burning tallow candle all over the stain, and then washing it out with a concentrated solution of pyrophosphate of soda.

A LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—Use emery powder and sweet oil, saturating a piece of spongy fig tree wood with the mixture and rub well. When thoroughly cleansed, if you plunge them in a box containing quicklime, not allowing the lime to touch the handles, you will keep them from rusting.

AMBITION.—While you might use, in writing a book, many of the words and expressions contained in a book already published and not be liable to prosecution for infringement of copyright, to do so would be in very bad form, and certainly would not pay. Originality is the only sure road to success in literary work.

MILLIE.—Before washing almost any coloured fabric, it is recommended to soak it for some time in water to every gallon of which has been added a spoonful of ox-gall, which is prepared by emptying it in a bottle with a handful of salt, and keeping the bottle closely corked.

FANCY.—An illegitimate child is entitled only to use the mother's maiden name as its surname; but in cases where the parents marry after the birth of the child, it is usual for the father's name to be used, and the child might in that case be legally described by the father's name.

IGNORAMUS.—In regard to the sound of a *do*, any work on orthoepy will explain the general principles of pronunciation, that of the English or any other language being in a great measure arbitrary and liable to change from one age to another. It varies not only in sections far distant, but in localities contiguous to each other.

IN GREAT TROUBLE.—Just what your full duty is towards yourself and a man who is now a drunkard, but was once the nearest and dearest person on earth to you, is a question that must be settled by yourself. So many contingencies enter into such a decision, that we fear to give positive advice, especially when our knowledge of the case is limited.

IN DIFFICULTIES.—Stepfathers or mothers have a clearly defined status, and are entitled to the common courtesies of life at least, and all things being equal, to the utmost consideration. Your children have equal rights with the others, and this should not be questioned. It is a shame for people to wrangle and dispute and try to crowd each other out of the proper places in life. Try in every way to avoid quarrels. No good ever comes of them. At the same time insist that you receive the respect due to your position in the family.

ARCHIE ROSSMOOD.—There are various kinds of invisible inks, but here is a method of making ink which can be wiped off a sheet of paper with a pocket handkerchief without leaving a trace. Dissolve some starch in water until it is as thick as cream. Then add to it a few drops of tincture of iodine, which will turn the starch to a dark red colour. Now take a pen and write with this prepared ink upon a sheet of note paper. The ink will dry right away after which you may erase the whole of your letter by simply wiping the sheet with a pocket handkerchief. It will disappear as easily as chalk from an ordinary blackboard.

A MOST UNHAPPY ONE.—To cure stammering, several remedies are suggested. One is to read aloud with the teeth closed, reading about two hours a day for three or four months. Another is at every syllable pronounced, to tap at the same time with the finger. By so doing, it is said, the most inveterate stammerer will be enabled to converse quite fluently, and by long and constant practice will entirely overcome his impediment. The third remedy, in addition to keeping the teeth close together, is before attempting to speak, to inspire deeply, and take time for a quiet utterance. A very little practice is required to make this remedy effective.

MAY NAIKEN.—Take about four slices of stale bread, or its equivalent in fragments, remove all the crust, and pour about two cupfuls of boiling milk over them. Beat this thoroughly, until it is free from lumps, add one well-beaten egg, then stir again until the mixture is like thick cream. Add a little nutmeg, vanilla or other flavouring. Enter a pan, pour in the pudding and bake in a quick oven. It should be put into the oven about fifteen minutes before serving, as it is sent to the table immediately upon being done. It will have risen into a very light and delicate loaf, which is extremely palatable. It may be served with hard sauce or any dressing which is most liked.

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